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MY PRETTY JANE

OR

Judy and I

BY

ALFRED PRETOR

FELLOW OF ST. CATHARINE'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE

AUTHOR OF "RONALD AND I,"

"THE CHAPEL ON THE HILL," ETC.

cana fides praestat: quid enim diuinius? audi;
me penitus superat iudice fida canis.

A. W. SPRATT

CAMBRIDGE:

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1905

WEYMOUTH:

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To my friend
Mrs Thomas Hardy
a true lover of animals
to whom I dedicated
Judy's first memoirs
I dedicate the last

Judy's playground:

the scene of the courtship

"JUDY'S PLAYGROUND"

TO THE READER

In this—the latest and last of her memoirs—Judy reappears as the centre of a new environment. She has been transferred to fresh surroundings with another mistress in another home. But in all else her identity has been scrupulously preserved.

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Too far—and yet not far enough to pay the debt I owe for all the lessons of her life.

Cambridge,
September, 1905.

IN HOPE

* * * *

My more than friend, I look to meet again
And wander as of old till eventide,
Amidst the heather on the mountain side,
When my glad heart no memory shall hold
That once I saw you lying dead and cold.

MILLICENT VON BOESELAGER.

Perchance—who knows?—in blissful days to come,
Our dim eyes opened, and our story told,
When broken threads are knitted, and our home
Made ready, YOU *may meet us as of old.*

J. R. HENSLOWE.

Nor can we find anything throughout the whole ANALOGY OF NATURE *to afford us even the slightest presumption that animals ever lose their living powers; much less, if it were possible, that they lose them by death: for we have no faculties wherewith to trace any beyond or through it, so as to see what becomes of them. This event removes them from our view. It destroys a* SENSIBLE *proof, which we had before their death, of their being possessed of living powers, but does not appear to afford the least reason to believe that they are then, or by that event, deprived of them.*

And our knowing that they were possessed of these powers up to the very period to which we have faculties capable of tracing them is itself a probability of their retaining them beyond it.

BUTLER'S ANALOGY. *On a future life, part i., ch. i.*

CHAPTER I.

MY earliest memories are all of Rome—and of Rome's pleasantest quarter, the slope of the Janiculan. Many others have thought so before me, from Martial downwards, who praises its clearer skies and atmosphere, and the quietude from which you can look down on the turbulent city beneath. "To watch the flying chariots and hear no sound of wheels" was Martial's idea of happiness. I wonder what he would have thought of Rome in our days, and where he would have looked for his repose, when motors and cycles and the light infantry of perambulators have left to

far more emphatically than the interior of the building, the surroundings among which the inhabitants live and move and have their being.

It was among scenes like these my childhood was passed, and no child, I am sure, can have had a happier, restfuller home. The three of us, my father, my mother, and I, were wholly devoted to each other, and rarely, as our neighbours would smilingly remark, to be met with apart. My life was not made a burden to me by any hard and fast scheme of education. What I learned, I picked up in a casual, indirect way from the conversation of my elders, my father entertaining a pleasant belief that Nature was the best of all teachers for a growing child. Not but what I could have taken honours at an early age in a competitive examination on the early history of Rome, for my father never came across a famous locality in our walks without telling me the story of its past. And everywhere about the hill I was allowed to wander

where I chose, till I got to know each separate tree and landmark in the deep-cut lanes that formed a net-work round our little garden. And there was hardly a cottage in the neighbourhood that I was allowed to pass without a kindly greeting or the invitation to share a meal. It is not so here in Devonshire, though the scenery in which I find myself might almost be the same, and it needs scarcely a stretch of imagination to fancy I am treading once again the rich red loam of the Italian lanes.

And when I wanted rest there was always my father's work to interest me, at least when I was not posing for his model. It is true it was rather a grievance with me that he would only allow me to watch him from a distance. It made him nervous, he said, to have me standing at his elbow, as I dearly wanted to do, to see how he laid on his colours and how the picture grew beneath his hand.

Sometimes, when things were prosperous and my father's pictures were selling well, we shut up the house and made pleasant little excursions to Assisi, Siena and Perugia, extending our flight now and then as far as the Riviera and the cities of the sea.

But these golden days ended once and for all when I had reached the age of fourteen. The summer had been unusually hot and unhealthy, and my mother, with a carelessness bred I suppose by long years of immunity, had neglected the commonest precautions when she went on an errand to a peasant's house in the Campagna. She knew fairly well when and how she caught the fever. She had forgotten how time was passing, and the fatal evening mist had closed in upon her before she could reach the shelter of the city. The fever quickly developed into a *perniciosa*, and within a week from the day on which she had contracted it she died.

With her death my father became a changed

man, one who had lost all interest in his work and his surroundings. His pictures, when occasionally he painted one, were weak and faltering in touch and, as a consequence, became unmarketable. Indeed, during the last years of his life, we found ourselves hard pressed for money. Even our tenure of the cottage was due to the kindness of the owner, who on every available pretext reduced the rent as he found we had more trouble in meeting it. And, as day by day I watched more hopelessly for the improvement which never came, I think it was almost a relief to me when, two years after my mother's death, my father followed her, for I could see nothing before him but a life of inactivity and want. The day before he died he called me to his side and placed in my hands a letter addressed to his sister, Mrs. Ellery.

"She will look after you, Jane," he said. "Of that I am quite sure, for she is a good woman, though she is a hard one, and has quarrelled with

me ever since the day I married your mother. God knows I could not have done better for myself. And I thank Him too that I have been able to settle all my debts, and, when you have sold the pictures that remain for what they will fetch, enough will be left to pay for burying me and to see you safely to your Devonshire home. God bless and keep you, my dear. You have been the best of daughters to me.

"You will start on your journey, Jane, so soon as you have laid me beside your mother."

And these were the last words I heard him speak.

CHAPTER II.

THERE were four of them in all, a mother and three daughters, the latter all cast in the same mould and as like each other as three nine-pins, if you will excuse the solecism. One and all of them had sandy hair, no eyebrows to speak of, a colourless complexion, pale blue eyes, and thin parched lips, compressed as a rule with an air of rigid determination.

And they were as colourless inside as out, in mind as well as body. They all said the same things in the same way, dealt perpetually in small common-places and truisms, and never by accident

lighted on anything that was original or unconventional. In religion they were Pharisees of the strictest sect. Only in their case the Pharisee was engrafted on the Calvinist. I needn't tell you their names: as a matter of fact, I found it hard to remember them. Indeed, as they were all so exactly alike, it would seem an act of supererogation to have baptized them under different names. You might have thought that such a community—well-educated though soulless themselves—would have welcomed intelligence in others. Nothing of the kind. Not only had each one of them a full belief in her own infallibility, but the pride of the family was in their case super-added to the pride of the individual. If you said or did anything that offended one of them, all the rest were up in arms on the instant to crush you beneath the weight of a blank unreasoning self-confidence.

It was into this straightlaced community, most orthodox of the orthodox, that, at the age of

sixteen, I, a friendless half-educated Bohemian, found myself suddenly transplanted, and much resented the experience.

I shall never forget that first introduction. It was Caroline, I think—I am not sure at this date—who advanced to meet me as I entered the drawing room, half perished with cold and hunger, for I was fresh from a journey of three hundred miles, and the wind was east, and the day had been scathingly raw, and footwarmers were a luxury unprocurable by a moneyless schoolgirl of sixteen.

To a child like myself it was a change indeed to pass from our tiny little cottage in Rome to Mrs. Ellery's aristocratic home, situated within the folds of a Devonshire combe, with a park and a lake and a herd of deer, which latter I had always regarded as the very incarnation of luxury.

But now back to my reception. My cousin Caroline looked coldly upon me, colder even than

I felt after my long day's journey, and her first greeting did not tend to invigorate me.

"Well, child," she said, "you *do* look a figure. Was your frock made by yourself, or have you got into the slavey's by mistake? Surely there are ladies' tailors at Rome who could have made you a decent close-fitting frock for the journey?"

"Yes: lots of them, cousin," was my ill-considered reply, "only you see I hadn't any money to pay them with, so it was useless to trouble them. As a matter of fact my dress was made by the wife of our landlord, who also did our washing. But she was thought to have a nice taste in dress.

My cousin was petrified. "For heaven's sake, girl, spare us these sordid details. We have a party coming to dinner to-morrow, and I suppose you must come down in the evening. Tell them your landlady was a flower-seller or a perfume-maker or something with a local colour to it, or they'll faint on the spot."

"But my mother always told me never to be ashamed of my belongings. Your father (she would say) is a gentleman and an artist, and there's work for the lowest as well as the highest in God's world. And the lowest sometimes do their work the best, if what I've been told of high life is true."

If my introduction to the home party was a trying ordeal, for I found Mrs. Ellery an exact counterpart of her daughters, only on a larger scale, my first experience of an after-dinner reception was a far more trying one. My cousins, to my thinking, were none of them beautiful—except to the eye of faith as was their mother's. But they were all of them fashionably dressed, and all of them passably good-looking—to people, that is, who like sandy hair and a genteel colourless expression which never varied or betrayed itself by an unconventional emotion. They always reminded me of a sleek white cat I once had in Italy, who

had a pretty habit, when you looked at her, of rising gracefully and sitting down on her haunches like a penguin, drooping her paws the while over her breast in the attitude of a nun at prayer. But Fifine was no nun. On the contrary, she presented us with three litters of kittens per annum with the most undeviating punctuality.

I have often thought what an outsider I must have looked among them that evening in my washed-out colourless frock—to say nothing of my pinched yellow face and the great black eyes, which were indeed my one redeeming feature. When I was in trouble, which was not often, on the score of my ugliness, I would comfort myself by reflecting that lean scraggy girls often develop into beauties. At least one did so, once—a Roman Empress I think she was, though I don't now remember her name.

There was one old gentleman, by the way, among the party, who rather took a fancy to me.

"I like you, little girl," he said, "you're so original and unconventional."

"What's that?" I asked him. "I suppose you mean my manners are bad."

"Not at all," was the reply. "I shouldn't be so rude. Only rather free and easy, which is a treat in this confined atmosphere. And you say just what you mean with a queer kind of bluntness."

"But surely speech was given us for the purpose of declaring our thoughts?"

"Don't you believe it, little girl," was his reply, "say rather for the purpose of hiding them." Whereupon he left me with a problem to study.

CHAPTER III.

SURELY no two houses, so glaringly contradictory in tone, were ever planted in such close juxtaposition as the Manor House and Ellery Hall. They confronted one another from the opposite sides of a wide combe in the direction of East and West, and the valley between them opened out towards the South till it ended in a wide expanse of sea and sand. But, given this much of agreement, all similarity between them ended. One wondered how Ellery Hall, by far the more recent building of the two, should have ventured to court so damaging a comparison. The

Manor House was three hundred years old—an example of the finest work in the Elizabethan period. And house and lawns and terraces were all maintained in such perfect order that the owner of them, Sir Rolf Weston, might have been expecting a visit from the virgin Queen herself, who (report said) had done this honour to his ancestor on the completion of the building. Every smallest fragment of lawn shone with the sheen of velvet, and had evidently been treated after the recipe given by a College gardener to an American millionaire who was eager for information how to secure a similar result. "You must roll it for one or two hundred years," was the historic reply. It was clear, even to the most casual observer, that here, at any rate, all that money could do towards enhancing its natural advantages had been lavished on the property, and that it responded gratefully to the hand of the owner.

But at Ellery a blight would seem to have fallen

on the house and its surroundings. Far larger in size than the Manor House, and far more extravagant in its pretensions, there had been no grace or beauty in the original design, and the architect's instructions or inclination had led him into the fatal mistake of a costly and inartistic display. Built only a hundred years back, it had already fallen on evil days, and the effect of cheap and inefficient workmanship was even now betraying itself under the disintegrating hand of time. The stucco had broken away in parts, making an untidy patchwork of the walls, while lawns and shrubberies and gardens all bore traces of a stinted, jealously restricted outlay. Even the deer in the deer park—a herd that had dwindled down to the very smallest proportions—seemed out of place among such uncongenial surroundings, and only accentuated the contrast between the present decay and the outlay that must have been expended on the original building.

And the external difference between the two buildings would seem to have reflected itself on the character of the occupants. Sir Rolf Weston, owner of the Manor House hard by, was (I was soon to discover) the ideal of a free-handed, open-hearted country squire, with whom everything in this life had gone well and who had no semblance of a care to trouble him. A man who made a pleasure of existence and was bound by no rigorous theories of duty, but had won the hearts of all the country round by a kindly sympathy that was for ever extending its radius and gaining him new friends. Over and over again I was to see him abandoning his very heart's desire, the pleasure of a day's hunting, to help a fellow-being in sorrow or an animal in pain.

At Ellery Hall, on the contrary, everything was self-centred and contracted within the limits of a morbid self-consciousness—an adhesion to the letter of the law with a total contempt for the spirit of it.

Never had I seen a family who so entirely dissociated their religious belief from the purpose of its tenets. In theory, beyond all question, they were avowedly and pre-eminently religious; far more so than Sir Rolf, who thought nothing, I am afraid, of being absent from church if the weather was tempting, or he had any special reason for inspecting a part of his estate. My aunt and cousins, on the other hand, were instant, in season and out of it, in churchgoing, visiting and distributing tracts. And there, from their point of view, their duty ended. The tracts and homilies, when delivered, had to work their own results, unaccompanied by consolation, sympathy or help. You cannot hold such persons guilty, for they do all that they think it is required of them to do, their conscience the while being troubled with no misgivings. And yet it is to these well-disciplined and self-satisfied Christians, even more than to its flagrant offenders, that the world owes a large part of its sorrow and suffering.

Such characters, I think, may well be a trial to the Recording Angel. An act of real self-sacrifice, an overt sin—even we can differentiate these, and mark the one with chalk, the other with charcoal. But how apportion its due reward to a character that does no evil (or so it thinks) and no good (that the world can recognise)—which performs with scrupulous exactitude its little routine of conventional duties, and neglects the weightier things of unselfishness and love?

Natures like these are inaccessible, it would seem, to outer influence, unless it appears in some startling form that shakes the very structure of their self-content. What they are, they will remain, unalterable by time and circumstance, only becoming harder and more self-centred as the years move on. The interests and sympathies that mould the lives of others into higher, nobler forms would seem to pass them by in favour of those who offer a more open-hearted welcome.

Everything at Ellery, within and without, looked perishing for lack of human interest. The inhabitants had shut their doors (metaphorically) upon the world with all its life and sympathies, and the world had responded, as is its wont, by performing the same ungracious act to them. Only with the Rector, and the family on the opposite side of the combe, were more than the forms of friendship maintained—in the one case for a definite reason. For the future heir of the Manor House had bestowed his affections, they told me, on my cousin Josephine. Not that there was any great pretension of love, at any rate on the side of the gentleman. It was simply that he had recognised with the eye of an artist what a fine property could be made of the two estates by enclosing them within one fence. Add to which, he would be able, if he chose, in the future to obliterate from the surrounding landscape the barrack-like building which had always

been an eye-sore in the view from the Manor House windows.

It was not till I had been a week or two in my new home that my impressions of Ellery Hall and its occupants took the shape and form in which I have represented them to the reader. On my first arrival I had no time or data afforded me for an analysis of my surroundings, only a vague and uncomfortable feeling that my life had been suddenly transferred to a scene which, in comparison with my tiny Italian home, was overpoweringly and oppressively magnificent.

I got through the week days at Ellery Hall fairly well. My cousins weren't bad to me on the whole—only uncongenial and Pharisaical. Besides, we spent all our mornings in "being finished" by a high-class governess, and the experience was a triumph to me as I could parade before them my one and only talent in the rudiments of a splendid voice, beside which their own feeble twitters were

as the cheeping of a sparrow to the song of a skylark.

And in the afternoon we were left to our own devices, to go where fancy took us, when I made friends with the dogs and horses, while my cousins found their pleasure in a never-ending, ever-increasing round of calls, working through and through their visiting list with a persistency that reminded me of a postman's rounds.

My own predilection generally led me in the direction of the shore. How I delighted in that wind-swept sea after the tideless, soulless Mediterranean with its persistent blue and never-ruffled calm. At least it has that reputation, though personally I have been nearer shipwreck in the Gulf of Lyons than in countless passages since across the Bay of Biscay. But here at Ellery I had a sea after my own heart's desire, a sea that changed as rapidly as the shadows shifting on the cliffs, smiling or sullen, asleep or storm-tost, often

without note of warning to prepare one for the change. "Come, Judy," I would say—she was the only possession I had brought from Italy, and my dearest friend among the multiplicity of hounds that thronged the Ellery mansion—"you and I will go down to the sea and you shall hunt for the crabs you delight in, while I'll bask in the sun and look on."

Judy always accepted the invitation with an approving yell—not a howl or a bark, but something betwixt and between: a scream I suppose you would call it. It was not pretty or musical, but it was her one invariable way of expressing extravagant delight. By the way, Judy's companionship in my expeditions cost me a small fortune. She was self-restraint incarnate as a rule, but could never resist the attraction of a stray hen when it straddled, fluttered and screaming, from its nest in an adjacent hedge. Over and over again I was mulcted of half-a-crown, as the price

of some scraggy fowl that was a disgrace to its parents, which Judy would carry laboriously, up hill and down dale, to the sea (she only weighed six pounds herself) and there she would decently inter it, with a side glance now and then in my direction to make sure I was asleep or unappreciative of the business in hand.

So the weekdays sped pleasantly on. But Sunday was a day of trial to me, as it is I fear to many or most children. On that day no manner of amusement, not even a walk with Judy, was admissible. How often I yearned for the easy, unrestricted freedom of a foreign Sunday. By which I don't mean anything bad or irreligious. But the day was meant pre-eminently to be a day of rest and happiness; and that is just what our English system fails to make of it. I can pray (at least I hope so) out of doors—"worship in the Temple of Nature" I have heard it called—or in the dim obscurity of some huge cathedral, or (best

of all) in the cheerful atmosphere of a village church. I prefer, for choice, the old high-backed pews of my youth, and I like to look through the open doors upon the sunlight glancing on the graves or playing with the shadows on the tombstones, and I like a swallow or a robin to look in occasionally and take his part in the service. But I felt "cribbed and cabined" in the church, planted in the village-green, to which we were solemnly conducted twice on every Sunday. A formal ugly building it was, of bright red brick, like a prison or workhouse, with rounded windows guiltless of coloured glass, with a gallery at your back and the Commandments in front of you, with no grace or charm in it to elevate the mind; a place in which good music would have been an outrage, because hopelessly out of character with its uncongenial surroundings. Of the merits of the sermon I was not appreciative; though too appreciative of its length. It was fortunate perhaps that I took in

little of its significance, else its dreary threatenings might have quelled the life within me, making me dull and introspective as their religion had made my cousins.

CHAPTER IV.

IT was in one of my seaside rambles that an event took place which influenced my life and character almost before I was aware.

The sun was hot and I had dropt asleep in a pet little nook of my own, where the cliff sent out two arms and protected me from the wind, which still blew cold—for it was only May. Judy, having tired herself with digging and hunting for crabs, lay asleep too, with her head on my shoulder, till she sniffed danger and woke me with a muffled bark. The danger appeared in the shape of a good-looking stranger—about twenty, so far as I could guess his age—who was coolly setting up an

easel in my own particular domain, and preparing to paint the sea-scape before us, without so much as a word of apology for the intrusion. I was so astonished at his audacity that, for the moment, I could only look at him in speechless indignation. Whereupon he spoke.

"You don't mind, I hope, my sharing your comfortable quarters? It's the only place I can find that will shelter me while I'm at work."

My cousins, I felt sure, would have bowed stiffly, and retired gracefully from such dangerous contact. But I was made of sterner, or perhaps more frivolous, stuff and answered reassuringly: "Not a bit of it: why should I? The shore is free to both of us. Besides, I've never watched anyone painting and should like to see how it's done. You're not nervous, are you?"

"Not a bit of it: to quote your own expression. Neither should I fancy are you, to judge from your appearance."

"Oh! appearances are deceptive," was my reply. "But you are right in this case. For I was bred up abroad, and do not know what nervousness is—at least with congenial companions," remembering how words always failed me in the presence of my cousins.

"Well, that means, I hope, that you find me congenial. But we mustn't waste time in complimenting each other, for I must get to work before that lovely shadow is off the hills."

With that he commenced to sketch in his subject, using his pencil so deftly that I was lost in admiration and waited anxiously till he should apply himself to the still more interesting department of colouring.

"Do you know," he said, looking up suddenly, "I should rather like to paint you, if you wouldn't mind."

"Paint *me?*" I questioned in astonishment. "What on earth would you find to paint in me?

I'm thin and scraggy, with lean arms and legs, and haven't a good feature in me—except, perhaps (reflectively), my eyes."

"Ah! but as it happens, I don't want to paint your arms and legs; only your eyes which, as you correctly say, are the best part of you. Not but what you may get handsome enough as time goes on. Girls of your figure often do." A confirmation this of the theory I had built up upon the story of the Roman Empress.

"I think I should rather like it," was my reply. "But not," I added hesitatingly, "till I've known you much longer. Though my father, by the way, was an artist too, and used often to sketch me into his pictures. But he was more nervous than you are and would never let me watch him at work."

"And can you draw too?" he asked me, forgetting apparently that conversation is a hindrance to work.

"Not a scrap," I answered. "You couldn't tell

my horses from cows or my clouds from door-mats. But I can sing," I added hastily, being ever prematurely ready to air my one accomplishment. "Would you like me to sing to you now, while you are at work?" And, without even waiting for his permission, I struck up "My pretty Jane"—surely the sweetest of rustic love-songs—after carefully scanning the distance to make quite sure no trippers were in hearing.

"Yes: you can sing," was his comment, which was his sole appreciation and rather disappointed me. To which he added, "and is your name Jane?"

On this I—even I, my friends—thought we were getting on too fast. So, gathering up my impedimenta, in the shape of a shawl and book and Judy's crabs—she always expected me to carry them home—I wished my new-found friend a distant "good morning," and turned my face homewards to Ellery Hall.

"Mary," I said that evening to the middle-aged

attendant, of whom, with my three cousins, I could claim a quarter share, "Mary," I said, while she was tireing my hair against the dinner hour, "do you think it wrong to meet a young man—a good-looking one too—on the sands and talk to him without an introduction?"

"Wrong, Miss? Certainly not. How else are you to know what he's like? Didn't I always meet my own young man on the sands?—at least till he left me to keep company with another girl. And how else should we meet him? Do you think *we* wait till we've found out his name and address, and if he's respectable? All that comes afterwards when you've made out whether you like him or not."

I was still only half reassured. "But they don't do so in our class, Mary. You mustn't even speak to a young man till you've been properly introduced to him, and never, never when you're alone with him."

"Well, it may be so, Miss, with the gentlefolks:

I'm no denying it. Different ways for different classes. And right it should be so. All I can say is, we should wait long enough for a husband if we didn't go walking with a young man as soon as he asked us."

It was not till a week later that I met my friend again. The weather had broken and a walk to the sands was impossible. Meanwhile I had summoned up my dignity, and met him with a chill reserve which clearly perplexed him, considering our free and easy introduction.

But perhaps, before I tell you more about our interview, you would like to have an idea of his personal appearance. Well, he was nice (to a woman's eye), very nice. Fair, with crisp curly hair, and the warm glow on his features that comes of much living in the open air. His eyes, I fancy, were hazel. He was not too short, and not too tall; in fact, he was the "juste milieu" as we say in France. And he was strong and athletically

built; that is to say, all that a good tennis player ought to be.

"Why, how cold you are!" he said, "not half so nice as on the first morning we met. One would think I was an ogre. Do I look like one?"

"Not at all—far too good-looking," I replied ingenuously. "But appearances, as I told you before, are deceptive, and you may be one in disguise, for all I know."

"Well: after that, I had better relieve your mind by telling you who I am, especially as I've found out who you are. You see I took enough interest in you to find out that. I'm a near neighbour of yours—Sir Rolf Weston's nephew (he lives at the Manor House you know)—not an eldest son, I'm afraid, and compelled, worse luck, to work for my living."

"What, the artist who has only just come back from Rome, and of whom all the world expects so much?"

"It may expect it," he answered, "but whether it will get it, is quite another story. I rather think not, though of course I have a strong belief in my own capabilities. Meanwhile, you aren't afraid of me now, I hope?"

"Of course not," I said, "for our people call at your house and are often talking about you and your cousin. Indeed, the eldest is rather taken with Sydney. They will be surprised when they hear of our acquaintance. But you might have told me all this," I continued reproachfully, "when we first met. Meantime, I've been asking my maid whether it was proper to talk to a man whose name I didn't know. Fortunately for me, she said she didn't see any harm in it."

"And now that you find I'm quite respectable, I suppose you'll let me paint you—only your eyes, you know—and a little bit, I suppose, of your face," he added with a smile.

"Again you're too quick, I replied, "much too

quick. Of course I must ask aunt Ellery and get permission first."

"Well, look here," he said, and, opening his portfolio, displayed to my astonished eye a portrait of myself. At least I suppose it was intended for me, but it was so improved upon and beautified that I should never have recognised it for my own presentment.

"Now I do call that mean. All the time we were making friends, and talking of everything under the sun, you must have been thinking out this picture and never let me know a word of it. Yes, I do think now that you are an ogre—declared and without disguise."

"Don't be so angry," he said, "wait till you have heard my defence. At least it's a pretty picture: you won't deny that: though it doesn't half do you justice. And what's more, I'll make you a present of it, and promise never to paint another until I have your permission. Now, I call

that a handsome promise, especially as the temptation's great. Are you satisfied and are we friends again? or am I still an ogre?"

"Yes, I think that'll do," I said cautiously. "But I must still ask aunt Ellery first, and, if she says it's all right, we'll shake hands over it." To which I added contritely: "But I thank you for the picture all the same. Only it's much too good-looking for me. Perhaps," I added wistfully, "you have painted me not as I am, but as you think I may be?"

"Yes," he answered, "I think I have."

CHAPTER V.

"STOLEN waters are sweet," and I had acquiesced in several more meetings with Walter before I allowed the news of them to reach Mrs. Ellery's ears through the medium of the invaluable Mary.

There was something in its Bohemian informality that gave to our love-making a peculiar attraction, and, if events had not moved more rapidly than I intended, my aunt would have been left a considerable time longer in her blissful ignorance. In addition to the primary question whether he would come at all on any particular day, there was always a pleasant uncertainty as to the mode and manner

of his coming. Sometimes he would drop down upon me from the cliffs above: sometimes appear from the sands on one or other side of me, while occasionally I would find him already encamped within the shelter of the cove.

To-day he had adopted a new method of introducing himself upon the scene. I had hardly left the house when I noticed a tiny speck upon the waters making so directly for our trysting-place that my prophetic soul had guessed the truth long before I could recognise my friend in the person of the oarsman.

"I am lazy to-day, Miss Thornton," he said, so soon as we had exchanged our greetings, "and not up to sketching. Besides, I haven't brought my materials."

"Either reason would have done," I answered, "especially the latter. At least it was accepted, or another to the same effect, by Queen Elizabeth, when the Mayor of Plymouth, in regretting that

he hadn't rung the bells in her honour, pleaded as an after-thought that there were no bells to ring. But I know you will go on to tell me more circumstantially why you didn't bring your sketch-book. You don't look, I fancy, particularly unfit for work."

He took no notice of my interruption, but gave himself away at once.

"Perhaps, Miss Thornton," he continued, "you'll let me take you for a row instead. The sea is like a pond for stillness, and we need only go a little way out."

"Ah! now the mystery is explained," I answered. "Yes: I should like it above all things. Only I hope we shan't be recognisable from the sands in case my aunt or cousins should extend their afternoon walk in this direction. Not that I can see any possible harm in it, now that I know who you are, and we've gone through the formality of an introduction."

Judy was shy of embarking, having never been

inside a boat before, and, after satisfying herself that there was nothing worth inspection within the limited compass available, she curled herself up in my lap as the safest place in which to meet emergencies, supposing we should develop any fresh form of Midsummer madness.

I imagine that lovemaking—given the predisposing causes—progresses more rapidly, by wider leaps and bounds, in a boat than under any other possible circumstances. Always provided that there are only two of you, and the weather is calm, and you sit face to face, as we did, throughout a summer afternoon. Provided too, of course, that there is a mutual affinity to start with between the man and woman who comprise the crew. Amid such favourable surroundings what else indeed can you expect, seeing you are compelled perforce to stare each other in the face and register individually the attractions which have hitherto appealed to you only in their collective form?

It was thus we occupied ourselves—at least I did—until Walter, I suppose, got tired of rowing, or had catalogued to the full the list of my limited qualifications, for he suddenly discovered that the boat could be trusted to take charge of herself. Only the duties of steering her would require his presence in the stern. To do this effectively, it was necessary for him to be seated at my side, and, in reaching to grasp the tiller-ropes, incidentally to enfold me with an arm.

"I hope it's not rude," I said (it was necessary to break the silence which had become embarrassing), "but I can't help speculating whether you know how exactly flannels and an Oxford tie suit your style of complexion, and whether the knowledge influenced you in any way in the choice of to-day's excursion."

"Nothing half so unworthy of me, Miss Thornton. I'm surprised at your suggesting it. It was simply and solely the idea of giving you a pleasant time—

with a little hope thrown in that it would be the means of our becoming better acquainted. Do you think it has answered its purpose?"

"Of course it has," I replied. "I have done nothing else but study your face and character. You don't suppose, I hope, that I should have ventured to tell you at our first meeting that you looked well in flannels. Why, I feel we are quite old friends now, and that I can talk to you like a sister."

"Many thanks," he said, "although that's not quite the spirit in which I would have you converse with me. However, that's another story, and can wait for a day or two. Meanwhile I am quite satisfied to hear that our friendship has been really gaining ground, though we haven't aided its progression by any great amount of conversation, have we? 'Not dead, but spache-less,' as the Irishman said when he fell through the roof of the conservatory."

This as he was helping Judy and me to disembark.

"We must try it again," he continued, "though I fancied at first that you were inclined to treat my forethought with suspicion. You aren't really sorry now, I hope, that I came round in the boat instead of doing the usual walk?"

"No: it has been delightful," was my reply, "and we did well not to break the charm by talking." But inwardly my conscience registered a vow that it must by no means happen again. And so it came to pass that on that very evening my aunt received through Mary her first intimation of the change that had come into my life.

It had become necessary, even I could see, that we should take her at last into our confidence.

"JUDY"

CHAPTER VI.

IT was pretty to see how Judy, with her usual wisdom, had accepted the inevitable and chummed with the cats at Ellery Hall. Elsewhere a cat had always been "anathema" in her eyes, and it was the difficulty of my life to prevent her from rending or being rent whenever she met a strange one in the road. Even the stable cat she accepted only on sufferance, and delighted in "treeing" her when she caught her alone in the garden. Her next step was to tear away all the ivy that clung about the trunk, under the idea

apparently that she could pull the tree down about her ears, the cat meanwhile regarding her with contempt.

In the drawing room, however, she accepts the pair of them, Toby and Sambo, as essential to the surroundings, and lies peaceably between them on the rug, submitting to be cleaned and purred over and kissed, only protesting by the gentlest of growls when she thinks they are becoming too forward in their advances. To-day she and Toby were making a pretty study in black and white, Toby's coal-black paws being laid caressingly over her head. But Toby must have had, I think, an evil dream, and kicked out, disturbing her slumbers, and I left them on the brink of a quarrel, to follow Caroline who had been deputed by Mrs. Ellery to summon me to an enquiry on my misdeeds of the previous week. There was no help for it, so I followed in fear and trembling. But I needn't have been so much

afraid. The elements were after all propitious, though, it is true, things began inauspiciously.

"What is this I hear of you, Jane Thornton?" she said. (My name, as I have already informed you, is Jane, and my friend of the sands had hit the mark). "Mary has told me, with or without your sanction, that you have scraped an acquaintance with our neighbour's nephew, young Walter Weston. Most indelicate of you, I call it, though I grant, all things considered, it might have been worse. For all you knew, he might have been some £5 London tripper, instead of the son of thoroughly respectable parents whom we've known for years."

"But indeed, aunt, you're wrong. I didn't 'scrape an acquaintance' with him—nothing of the kind. On the contrary, I was fast asleep, and only woke up to find his easel set up beside me, and the man himself beginning to draw."

("Naughty boy!" screamed a parrot from some dusky corner of the room).

My answer rather took the wind out of her sails. But she was by no means pacified yet, or at any rate pretended not to be. For I feel sure at this date that she was very well pleased at heart that I had managed to interest so eligible an acquaintance. Her ill temper, too, was only superficial, and I could see her scrutinising me complacently as if to discover what on earth he could have seen in me to make him so desirous of my company.

"Well, at any rate, Jane, you should have told him your name and asked him for his own. Or, better still perhaps, you should have said 'good morning,' and left him to his painting."

"Yes: I might have done that, to be sure," I responded doubtfully. "But to exchange names so early in the day would have been rather a forward proceeding, wouldn't it? Besides, he was good-looking and I rather liked a chat with him."

("Very good: very good," muttered the parrot in his corner).

And either my reply, or the parrot's comment upon it, again non-plussed my aunt, who, objecting to this attack upon her own defences, took refuge in amenity.

"At any rate it's over now," she said, "and no great mischief done. Only let it be a warning to you to be more careful in the future. Your continental manners are not ours, remember."

"No, they are much stricter," was my internal comment. (And, as if the parrot had possessed a thought-reading power, "Right you are: quite right," he muttered sententiously).

"It's not our custom," continued my aunt, "for young ladies of your age to pick up casual acquaintances like that. Above all, in a neighbourhood like this, where that Philistine, the cheap tripper, has swooped down on us. And in any case you mustn't meet him again alone. This evening, as it happens, we are to dine at Sir Rolf's, and I'll strain a point in your favour, young as you

are, and you shall go with us instead of Caroline, as I intended. You had better, by the way, take one or two of your best songs with you: Sir Rolf is devoted to music" (she added as an afterthought).

"Goodbye, Jane: don't be long!" shouted the parrot, as I was leaving the room.

"Be quiet, Polly," said his mistress angrily.

It was quite a small party, I found, when we entered the Manor House drawing room. And it threatened to be a dull one, till I found that my new-made friend had been told off to keep me company during dinner, a fact which comforted me exceedingly, especially as I looked rather well, I thought, in my white Liberty frock, with just one blossom of scarlet hibiscus in my hair to brighten it up.

There were only eight of us. Sir Rolf, his son and his nephew, the Rector and his daughter, with our own party from the Hall, completed the octave which the late Sir Henry Thompson

regarded as the ideal number for a sociable dinner. The Rector was paired with Josephine—to her regret, or so it seemed to me: at any rate she looked longingly, I thought, towards the son and heir of the family. And then my friend of the sands gave me his arm, and we took up our conversation of the previous day at the point where we had left it.

"Well, and how did the interview go off?" he asked me, as we settled ourselves down to a course of turtle soup. "Only," he added, "you mustn't talk too rapidly, or I shall lose the flavour of the green fat, as the Alderman said to his neighbour at a city banquet."

"It was very greedy of him," I answered, "and quite as greedy of you. So I shan't tell you much till you've finished. Though indeed there isn't much in it to tell, for the parrot, as it happened, took the main part in our trialogue."

"How I wish I had been there to hear it! I

love that bird. By the way, it has already caught your favourite song, and says 'my *dearest* Jane' with such appealing tenderness that I grow quite jealous. Though, as a rule, it's not by any means a decorous talker. Not the most persistent of training under the most austere of teachers has enabled it to forget the company in which it travelled from abroad. I hope it didn't swear at you."

"On the contrary, it blessed me altogether, and emphasized every point I made in my defence. By the way, I wonder why a parrot is always christened in the feminine?"

"Because it talks so much," he answered with alacrity.

"It's all right," I continued, without noticing the calumny, "only I mustn't do it again. No more walks with you abroad, on the beach or anywhere, except under strict supervision by the constituted authorities. My aunt said that,

for all I knew, you might have been a cheap tripper."

"Good Heavens! surely not so bad as that? Do you know you are looking rather well to-night —an anticipation (in fact) of my portrait? That scarlet hibiscus in your hair was quite a stroke of genius. I wish you had worn it when we painted our picture."

"'*We* painted' and '*our* picture!' I wonder you aren't ashamed of yourself, when you know I had not the smallest suspicion of what you were doing."

"I am seldom ashamed of anything that gives me pleasure, Miss Thornton"—an unchristian sentiment to which I didn't vouchsafe a reply.

At this point the menu appealed to him again. "What a cook Sir Rolf keeps," he remarked. "This *vol-au-vent* is a dream. Why, you're never leaving yours? Remember what they used to tell you in the nursery of all the poor children who would be thankful for your leavings."

"And that's just why I'm leaving it for them," was my thoughtful reply.

Then a short silence, after which he began again. "And what do you think of my cousin?" he asked. "Remember he's the eligible 'parti,' and if you intend to let him cut me out, tell me so at once and I shan't feel it so much."

"Good-looking, but not congenial," I replied with cosmopolitan freedom. From which it will be gathered that our acquaintance had made progress, even under the eyes of Mrs. Grundy—in other words, my aunt. "And so far as I can see, I shan't be given the chance of making a choice between you. For my cousin seems to have appropriated him, and by the way he strains his voice to talk to her across the table he is not entirely irresponsive to her charms."

When we had migrated to the drawing room, I was asked to display my voice and execution.

"Sing them 'My Pretty Jane'" whispered my

friend at my elbow. "By the way, your name is Jane, for I heard your aunt tell my cousin so. Don't be afraid," he added, as I blushed (I hope becomingly). "I wont give you away, and no one else will notice the coincidence."

The winsome little ditty seemed to appeal to my audience, for the Rector complimented me and even Sydney Weston left his place at my cousin's side and crossed the room to express his appreciation. "Music, and especially good singing, is the thing above all others that attracts me. You will be a gain to our neighbourhood, Miss Thornton, in the name of which I welcome you," he added consequentially.

While Josephine was hammering out the Moonlight Sonata, playing all the soft passages *forte* and drowning the melody under a heavy accompaniment, I had time to look about me and take stock of the audience.

Old Sir Rolf, I decided, was an eminently

loveable old gentleman, florid and silver-headed and entirely satisfied with himself and his surroundings.

His son Sydney was handsome, undoubtedly, handsomer even than my friend. But far less attractive—on this point I was equally decided. His mother, who had died some years previously, had given him her dark hair, dark eyes and dark complexion, so that he was in all points a contrast with his cousin. But his eyes were sly and cruel, I thought, and there was a look of strong determination about his lips that augured badly for anyone who should come between him and his purpose.

The Rector, as I could have gathered from his sermons, was obtrusively evangelical—a man who had read little and thought less. His opinions, religious and secular, had evidently been adopted second-hand, and, like all opinions which have never been enlarged by reading and experience,

were immutably fixed and, like the laws of the Medes and Persians, would "alter not" under any pressure of circumstance. "So you come to us from abroad, Miss Thornton—uncontaminated, I hope, by the evil influences of Papistry and Idolatry? Well, you have come to the right quarter for counteracting all such ideas. You're not lukewarm, I hope?"

What was I to answer? I temporised: let me confess it with contrition of heart. "No," I said, "I don't believe in confession or penances, or indulgences, or infallibility, or—or (I added hastily) in the celibacy of the clergy." Indeed, it quite surprised me to find how much I really discredited in the belief of Rome.

He was astonished, I could see, at the categorical readiness of my reply and left me with an approving nod. "Very good, very good indeed, my young friend. And you will be further confirmed I hope in these views by what you will hear from my pulpit."

Of this I was doubtful. But my answer, so far as it went, had been truthful, though I was glad when he left me and went his way without asking me whether I accepted his own belief as heartily as I rejected that of Rome. It was something to be thankful for, that my inquisitor had finished with me and that my little *suppressio veri* had passed undiscovered.

So soon as he was gone, Walter in a casual unconcerned way strolled up to my side and took the seat which I had been carefully guarding for him with an overflow of skirt. "So you've passed the ordeal, I see, and satisfactorily too, to judge by the benign way in which he laid his hand upon you at parting. But I want to speak to you now about our own concerns: I mayn't have another opportunity. You see I want you to let yourself be engaged to me. I may have to go abroad again soon, and I shall feel safer so, for I know my cousin's little ways and am by no means certain

that, for all his attentions to Josephine, he's not a little attracted too in your direction. Directly you began to sing, I saw him look at you in a way that long experience has taught me to distrust."

"Well—of all things in the world, Walter." (We had advanced you see to Christian names). It was thus I made answer in a construction which would have puzzled a grammarian. "I had no notion you were so suspicious, and of your own cousin too. Besides, I'm far too young—not seventeen yet, remember, and, for the matter of that, you are none too old. And even if I were willing, you've told me over and over again that you had no money to marry on."

"Yes, it's true enough: I grant it all. Only you needn't reckon up all my disadvantages so categorically. I've only five hundred a year, allowed me by my father, and even that uncertain, for he might withdraw it any day. But I'm older than I look—twenty-five—if you'll believe me. In

any case I intend to call and try my fortune with your aunt to-morrow, that is, if you will only give me leave. I'm young, I grant, which for my part I reckon among my advantages, and I've got a certain amount of talent, and something (Micawber-like) may always turn up to smooth the way for us. Of course it may be a long engagement. But I'll risk it, if you like me well enough to risk it too."

And while I was hesitating what to reply, a move was being made at the upper end of the drawing room and leave-takings were heard. My aunt I fancy must have taken fright at our long *causerie*—or was it Sydney, I wonder? (Walter's suspicions, I am afraid, must already have taken root).

CHAPTER VII.

I SUPPOSE he took my silence for consent. At any rate he came to Ellery the next day and saw my aunt and conquered. I fancy indeed that she capitulated without much fight, being at heart only too glad to get rid of me, especially by an arrangement that was so entirely creditable to the family.

"Of course we cannot be married for years," he said to me, "three years at least, I suppose, and you'll be barely twenty then. Meanwhile, I must do my level best to surmount the difficulty of the cash."

"I only wish I could help you, Walter. But Mrs. Ellery only allows me £50 for pin money. Her daughters, she tells me candidly, must have the rest. No doubt she said the same to you. I think after all," I added, "you should be the one to change your mind. Couldn't you transfer your affections to Caroline even now, before it is too late? I'm afraid Adelaide (my remaining cousin) is too young as yet."

"Thank you for nothing" was the uncompromising rejoinder, which, when you come to think of it, was not complimentary either to Caroline or me.

I wonder what is a fair amount of happiness, of perfect happiness, for us human beings to expect in our passage through this vale of tears? (Under which head I exclude from consideration that placid negation of pain which, with unemotional natures, passes for happiness.) Is it to be measured by days or weeks or months or years?

By a moment only, even if it be synchronous with life, is the verdict of Fitzgerald's unconscionable old Hedonist:

> "One moment in Annihilation's Waste:
> One moment, of the Well of Life to taste."

To me, at any rate, it has come for hours, such as we measure them: perhaps, if you include the night which followed, for one whole day, in spite of the two or three small clouds that were looming, even now, on the verge of my horizon.

But, for that one day at any rate, I was wholly, superlatively, happy. His satisfactory interview with Mrs. Ellery ended, Walter and I went down straight to the shore, taking Judy of course with us. Walter was as fond of the sea as I was, and to-day only its limitless distance supplied a wide enough horizon for our expansive happiness.

I am afraid, for that one afternoon, Walter conducted himself like any Dick or Tom or Harry who is out for the day with the maiden of his

choice. In the retirement of our cove, we were safe from Mrs. Grundy and her kin. It was hidden by a projecting undercliff from the walk which edged the summit of the cliff. In front of us was the sea, and, on either side of us, two other seas of sand—the play grounds in which Judy delighted and along which no intruder could approach us unperceived under a smaller interval than a quarter of an hour. Even Judy had other work on hand than to watch us "bill and coo," as I am afraid we did for two whole hours in a manner that would have turned my aunt and cousins to stone, had they been there to see. (I hope by the way they will not come across my story.) So we were left even without Judy to supervise us. And that means something, I can assure you. For never a dog of all that I have known in a fairly long experience studied the phenomena of life around her with so clear and appreciative an eye. She, the while, found plenty to amuse her in

hunting for crabs and shrimps among the pools and tresses of sea-weed that coloured the reefs in front of us with every soft gradation of crimson, russet and brown. And, when this amusement had palled upon her, she still found attraction enough along the undercliff in the mice that peeped in and out of the wiry tufts of sword-grass (*Danica* I am told is the proper name of it to persons who are never happy without a Latin synonym). Readers of mine, if such there be, will have understood by this time that Judy could do nothing clumsily. But her catching of mice was her very daintiest feat. She would begin by studying a likely tuft with head awry, and then lift herself suddenly into the air, all four legs set rigidly like a Noah's Ark dog, plumping down from the sky, as it would appear to them, on the top of her astonished prey.

By the time she had come back to us, we had settled down into the quiet orderly ways of

self-respecting lovers, discussing our plans for the present and our anticipations for the future with a sobriety that would not have resented the appearance of my aunt and cousins, if they had timed their walk that afternoon by way of a surprise.

"You can't think, Jane," said Walter, "how pretty the pair of you looked the first afternoon I met you on the shore, with Judy's whiteness set off by your own dusky curls. (Thought I: 'If I had been a man, I would have put it the other way round.') By the bye, Judy spoiled a fine canvas for me that day. If she hadn't growled to warn you, I should have been well on now with a picture of Ariadne sleeping on the sands of Naxos, with Bacchus coming in my stead across the foreground to waken her. As it was, you only got instead a very commonplace portrait. By the way, I've brought you to-day the companion picture to comfort you when I am absent. Do

you require it? or is it too good-looking to be true? You know you told me that I *was* good-looking once." And with that he drew from his pocket a tiny miniature of himself, and placed it in my hand. "And now you will forgive me, I suppose, for painting the other one, won't you? By Jove, how angry you were with me that day."

"Not really angry, Walter—all pretence on my part. I believe it was with that picture that you won my heart. But tell me how you did the miniature, there's the best of boys."

"Ah! that's to tell the secrets of the prison-house, or rather of the studio. As a matter of fact, I followed the old Dutch plan of Dow and Ostade when they wanted to focus their subjects. I set myself before a convex mirror and stared into it so long that I became vain of my own beauty; indeed, before I'd finished, I was as self-conceited as Narcissus himself. And now give me a kiss, Jane, in return for all this valuable information.

The afternoon wore on, and the sun drew towards his setting. As if he had not done enough for us in shining on two such happy mortals, he ended his favours with a display that realised for once the glory that he lavishes upon tropical climes. A huge Japanese lantern, a solid ball of gold and crimson, suspended veritably in mid air, such was the form he took for our delight. A day's journey, or so it seemed, might have taken us into the unknown behind and beyond him. And when he dropt, too swiftly, behind the veil of steel-blue mist that edged the distance round, he added nothing more—no faintest afterglow of light or colour, as if to tell the world that he had given her his best and would not mar the effect of it by any inferior display.

We had been vouchsafed a perfect sunset for the ending of a perfect day. And neither the day nor the sunset was ever to be quite reproduced in the days which followed it. For, on the morrow, the

cloud that had been as a man's hand had risen higher, and, for a time at least, threatened to obscure our whole horizon.

CHAPTER VIII.

MY fears, as it turned out, had been only too well founded. We had hardly finished breakfast the next morning when Walter came in, at least an hour before his usual time, with an open letter in his hand.

"Look here!" he said, "rather rough on a pair of young lovers, isn't it, Jane? if I have to leave you before our engagement is a week old. I had looked forward to our having a good time together, an anticipated honeymoon in fact, before I had to start on the hunt for work. And here it falls plump into my hands, only a little too soon for both of us and (worse still) at the farthest quarter

of the globe." And then he placed the letter in my hand. It was dated from the Grand Hotel, London, where I knew Sydney was staying for a day or two, and ran thus :—

"Dear Walter,

See what a cousin I am to you—always having you and your future in view. Now look what has come of it, the very opportunity you've been waiting for and wearying to get. Yesterday I lighted on Robson—he's the millionaire banker you know—just ordered abroad on a long trip for his health. He's bound in his yacht round the world, and starts on Saturday. Indeed, he may go anywhere. He's something of a collector you know and intends to make notes of all the queer things he sees and publish a book on them. Now he wants some one to do his views and illustrations for him. The man must be a good artist ; add to which, a gentleman. I mentioned your name,

and he positively jumped at the suggestion. He will give you £2,000 a year (he has doubled the salary to make sure of you), and all your sketches and pictures, after they've served his purpose, will be your own property, either for sale or exhibition. It's a chance in a thousand for you, if you can make up your mind at once and submit to the hurried departure. It's rough, I know, especially on Jane, considering your recent engagement. And it may last two or three years. But it will put you on the way for marrying directly you return, not so much by the pay it offers, though only a millionaire could offer it, as by the chance it will give you of completing a set of pictures that will take London by storm. Think it well over and wire to me as soon as possible.

Your affectionate cousin,

SYDNEY."

I'm afraid the tears came into my eyes. It did

seem hard on me to lose my brave young lover, so soon after I had found him. Six months later I could have spared him better, I thought. I should have learned more of him by then—of his looks and thoughts and ways—and have stored up many memories for after use, to think and dream of in his absence. Yes, I could have borne it better and looked forward less despairingly to the dullness that I could picture in the years that lay before me. "But this will never do," I reasoned with myself. "He may throw up the appointment, and with it perhaps the opportunity of his life—all out of concern for my silly sentiment." So I dried my tears, with a hope he hadn't seen them, and looked him bravely in the face.

"It's absurd to say I don't mind, Walter, for I do: I mind it most horribly. But that's neither here nor there, and I'm not going to stand in your way. You must wire your acceptance, before you and I have time to reflect and repent of it."

I saw him hesitating still. "You must, Walter," I said, "you *must*, if only for my sake. Think what it would mean to me if you lost it all on my account. And look forward to the future too, with all our difficulties solved and you become famous and our marriage made so easy. Besides, it may not be three years, only a year perhaps. And I'm sure we can trust each other, last as long as it may."

He bent down and kissed me. "Yes, I'll go, Jane," he said, "but only because you wish it."

Later on in the afternoon he and I took our final walk together before he left me, and his footsteps turned instinctively towards the sea. But I would have none of it that day. Our trysting place there was sacred, reserved for happy memories. I would not have its records clouded by our parting. Besides, it was the daily walk for Judy and me; and how was I to take it with her in the future, if every step of it was haunted by memories of Walter and recalled the day when I

had lost him from my side? When I should go there in the future, it should be a place to me, I determined, of no sad records—only of the day when first we met, of the day we ratified our love, not a day of sorrow or of parting. And so we went our way along a dull monotony of ugly fields and hedges, as ugly almost as Nature can be in the country, and as she never is when she spreads her sea and sands before you.

Of the trio, Judy, I imagine, was the only one who thoroughly enjoyed her walk. She had no dread, in those days, of any parting before her, and, better still, realised the one great ambition of her life, her triumph of triumphs, in that she caught a mole. It looked for a moment out of its burrow ("a bad look out for the mole" said Walter with an attempt at jocularity) and Judy was just too quick for it. Not that she knew what to do with it, when she had caught it. It was an unknown creature in her experience, so she

wisely retrieved it and laid it at my feet, with a look of enquiry as to what she should do with so queer a beast. I told her to let it go, whereupon it promptly burrowed before our eyes, increasing Judy's astonishment to an incredible degree, who was as surprised at the result as would have been the landlord of the estate if he had witnessed our novel methods in the art of farming.

Afterwards we came upon a little variety of prospect, an oasis in the midst of the flat ugliness. Three or four fine old elms had established themselves on the top of a small knoll, overlooking a tiny pond, and the rise in the ground gave us something of a view. Under their shade we threw ourselves down—at least I did—in sheer weariness of heart.

"What shall I do, Walter, what *shall* I do, all the time that you are gone?" And then I broke down and wept bitterly.

"Come, come, this will never do, little girl, you

must never give way in this fashion. What sort of a sailor or soldier's wife would you have been, I wonder? To some of them the whole of life must be made up of partings just like ours."

His words comforted me: perhaps his actions did still more. For he kissed me (I am ashamed to say) to such an extent—to make me feel quite sure he would never forget me—that Judy, who was not used to the ways of broken-hearted lovers, herself caught the infection, and danced and barked round us, either in protest or delight at our unusual employment.

"And remember," he added, returning to business, "in our case, it is all for our good, as they used to tell me when I was caned at school. In any case I must have left you soon to look for work. I can't produce saleable pictures for a long while yet, and couldn't have dawdled on at your apron strings like this. Though by the way ladies in our days don't wear an apron."

"Oh! it's not that," was my reply. "I could bear the parting if it wasn't for the fear that you would find some one abroad to like better than me. And I shan't be there to see it—I mean to call you back again. I shall fancy you all day long making love to some Fijian or Tahitian beauty."

"For Heaven's sake, little girl, don't let your thoughts run in that line. Why, I'll be true to you as steel, and I don't believe there's to be a woman in the company. As for the beauty of those island queens, they are mostly I fancy a fine dull copper in complexion—a colour I do not include in my list of feminine attractions. At any rate, there'll be none of them to match the dainty, black-eyed queen I've found at Ellery." But in all this he reckoned without his host, in the literal no less than the metaphorical sense.

However, I was comforted, especially as he kissed me by way of confirming it. Whereat

Judy barked again. And then, thinking, I suppose, that we had done enough to celebrate our parting, we accepted Judy's intimation and strolled back in the direction of Ellery Hall.

CHAPTER IX.

THE next day he was gone, and I had entered on my long period of waiting, to find myself grievously alone. Even my friend Mary had been tried and found wanting. She was no better than a broken reed to lean upon or, worse still, a false comforter, if I may allow myself two such conflicting metaphors. "It's my opinion, Miss," she would say authoritatively, "that you hadn't ought to have let him go. So far away too, and for so long. The fact is, Miss, men are poor creatures at the best—never to be trusted further than you can see them. They mean well, perhaps—at least some of them do—but they are shiftless, weak

things at best, who must have a woman of some sort near them or they are all at sea. And if their own particular woman's not handy, they'll take to some other one that is. Look, for instance, at my own Joe. Wasn't he all he should have been, as good and faithful as could be, so long as he had me at hand to watch him? And what did he do as soon as his work called him to London? Why, he forgot me within a week at most, and took up with another girl and married her, without so much as saying 'by your leave.' No: it isn't well to leave them to themselves, Miss. May be your own young man will take up with some dark-skinned girl in one of those outlandish islands. Though 'tis true he won't bring her home with him, so perhaps you'll never hear of it."

All this was the reverse of comforting, and I stopped Mary's speculations peremptorily. And at the same time consolation came to me from another and most unexpected quarter. My cousin

Adelaide to my surprise arose and shook off her stiffness and declared herself my friend. I had always liked her best of the three, and I think she had become interested in the progress of our lovemaking. Though I believe it was a desire for Judy's closer friendship that really decided her in my favour. Caroline, of course, had been against me from the first, because she thought I had poached upon her property. And my aunt and Josephine had never been over amenable, when they found I declined to attend them on their rounds of visiting whether to rich or poor. "I don't mind taking a tract in my hand" I said to my aunt "if you'll let me take some money in my pocket to sweeten it. But I'll not deliver the tract at a door in its bald simplicity, as if I were a tradesman soliciting orders, and with about the same result."

They said my heart was not in the work and looked coldly upon me in consequence.

Neither would I follow them on their round of afternoon teas. "Give me a dinner party" I said "and I'll go with you gratefully. During dinner one has time to get on terms of acquaintance with two at any rate of one's neighbours. Whereas, at an afternoon tea, you leave after a few words of commonplace, before you're a bit 'forrader' in the progress of a friendship." Whereupon they said I was vulgar and too much given to the pleasures of the table.

Meanwhile Ada, Judy and I were thoroughly happy together in our walks. For I was glad that she had taken so kindly to Judy, and that the kindness extended to me.

Our very first walk together was memorable for a noteworthy event in Judy's biography. (Bear with me, my friends, if I weary you. For Judy has gone from me now. And I must allow myself a page or two, once and again, in which to call her back to me with such poor skill as I can compass).

The lane down which we were passing ended under an iron railway bridge from which it opened on to the cliffs and sands. Judy was some distance in front of us, and I had no time to warn her, before a train was whizzing over head along the corrugated iron with a noise like thunder. The effect was instantaneous. Judy fell over on her back, her legs up-pointed in the air, stiff and rigid as the legs of a footstool planted wrong side uppermost. She remained in this position so long that I feared for a time she was killed or paralysed with fright. By degrees she recovered. But never, from that day to her last, could she be induced to face the bridge again except within the protection of my arms.

It was on that very afternoon, when she had recovered and was hunting as usual among every pool and sand-heap, that Ada, I remember, asked me why I had never taught her any tricks. "I'm sure," added Ada, "she's clever enough to learn them."

"No doubt, Ada" I answered. "Clever enough for anything—only you'd have a job to teach her. She'd think it waste of time. And I confess I rather agree with her. Why, when I was ill, she took the greatest possible interest in the doctor's visits, studying all his manœuvres, especially the application of the stethoscope, with the eye of a critic. Indeed, she so crept into his heart that, when her own time came—as it did soon after—the great man drove three miles out into the country twice a week to visit her and would never charge her a penny for his services. One couldn't teach a dog of that kind *tricks*. Indeed, no self-respecting animal can really like it and, for myself, I could no more put Judy through a course of gymnastics than I could teach my husband, if I had one, to catch biscuits from the tip of his nose."

CHAPTER X.

MARY had come to me this afternoon with something on her mind, as was clear from her preoccupied look.

"Well, Mary, what is it?" I asked, looking up at her from a piece of work with which I was keeping my hands from mischief—and my mind too, for the matter of that, for I was gloomy and depressed by the non-arrival of a letter from Walter.

"If you please, Miss, it's my young man who's in the kitchen and would like a word with you if you can spare the time."

"Which of them, Mary?" I asked, with a gloomy attempt at jocularity. "I am sorry, but there are so many that I have lost count, I'm afraid, of their coming and their going."

"Which of them, Miss? Now you didn't ought to have asked that. You know there's only been four of them in all, and it's not many girls in the village who can reckon up so few of them as that. Let me see. There was first of all Joe—him that I told you about, Miss, who went off to London and threw me over as soon as he had found another sweetheart. And then there was the soldier—no, I am wrong, it was the sailor boy who came next. And very good company he was, as all sailors are, till it comes to marrying them. And then, Miss, a woman had best leave them alone unless she wants herself for her company all the rest of her life.

"And then, yes, I am right now, came the soldier, who went and enlisted the very day before

we were to be asked in church. You see he was a journeyman carpenter before that, but he got timid—I knew he would—when the time came for his name to be read out before us all.

"And now it's William Jones, Miss, the best and steadiest of all of them, and one that I know won't take fright at anything. And he's in trouble now, worse luck, with Mr Sydney up at the Manor House, and he'll be very grateful to you, Miss, if you'll speak a word for him and set it right."

"Well, Mary, I'm glad you've finished the tale of your disasters and I hope William won't be another added to the list. And I'll try in future to remember their order. Let me see: 'sailor, soldier, tinker, tailor,' though I hope, for the credit of the family, you won't descend lower—to the tinker. Seriously speaking, you couldn't have come to a worse person to help you with Mr Sydney. You know I'm not on very good terms

with him—not the least in a position to win favours from him even if I cared to ask for them."

"Ah! there you're wrong, Miss, and that's why I ask you, for Mr Sydney's fond of you at any rate. May be he wouldn't listen to you if he were going to marry you himself. Men are like that. But, as it is, he'll do what you ask him, if it's only to make things pleasanter between you."

"Mary, you are a born diplomat, if ever there was one; though somehow I don't seem to relish the part you have given me in the play. But, out with it, and let me know what you want of me. Perhaps Sir Rolf could help us as well, and I shouldn't in the least mind appealing to him."

"And so he will, Miss: I never thought of that. You see it's like this. But here's William who will tell you all about it himself." And with that, Mary's fourth, if I was to believe her reckoning, advanced sheepishly into the centre of the room.

"You see, Miss, Mr Sydney and me have had

words over what he said was my neglect in collecting the beaters for his last shoot. And I suppose I answered him sharply, for I had really done my best. Anyhow he took offence and gave me notice off-hand. And I'm sure I don't know what father and I will do, for we've just furnished our little house here, and he won't give me a character when I go."

"Well, I don't like doing it, William, I candidly confess. However, I'll think it over and see what I can do for you to-morrow: it's too late to-day. Fortunately, I am sure to find the squire at home, for he told me yesterday he'd been letting his correspondence drift with the intention of answering it on Sunday."

Sir Rolf welcomed me with all his usual warmth. But, as soon as I had told him my mission, his face clouded over with a look of disappointment.

"There are not many things I wouldn't do for you, Jane," he answered, "but I am afraid that

this is one of them. You see the relations between Sydney and myself are already a trifle strained, and it is in the sporting department in particular that he resents the very slightest interference. Indeed, I handed it over to him once and for all a year ago, and I have never since questioned his management. But why not take the matter to Sydney himself? There he is going across the lawn to the stables. He's more likely to grant it to you than to any one."

Sydney acceded to my request with what seemed to me, even at the time, a suspicious readiness. It would have been more natural, I thought, if he had parleyed and argued with me. "And what's more, Jane," he added, "you and I will run down together to their house—we shall just have time before luncheon—and take them the good news in person."

I hadn't calculated on this, and would far rather have been excused. Yet he had been kind in

acceding so readily to my request and it would seem ungracious to refuse. Besides, I comforted myself with the reflection that the High Street, down which our path lay, would during church time be as desolate as the Great Sahara—no absenteeism being permitted by the Rector on any pretence, so far as his iron hand could reach.

But as soon as I had consented to accompany him, Sydney set himself to "mark time," deliberately and obtrusively, attending to a lot of little nothings that might just as well have waited his return. The consequence was that, when he was at last ready to accompany me after profuse apologies for the long delay, we made our start at just the very moment when I knew the congregation would be coming out of church. But it was too late to raise objections now, and I had still a hope that, by putting on the pace, we should get clear of the church doors before the service ended. But, as we turned the corner into

the street and came in view of the church, I saw my last hope vanish, for a black stream of people was already descending the steps—the majority of them turning up the street in the direction of ourselves.

Of course we fell right into the arms of my aunt and cousins, as my companion had possibly intended.

"Well, I *do* think," said Josephine, and she looked angrily at me, "I *do* think, Jane, that you could have found some better occupation for Sunday morning than tempting Sydney from his church to go promenading with you. And to choose the High Street above all things for the scene of your parade, at the very time too when you were sure to meet the whole of the village. It's the most scandalous performance, I think, I ever saw."

"Now, Josephine," put in Sydney, "don't let your angry passions rise till you've given us time

for our defence. Jane and I have been doing quite as much good outside the church as you have inside it—haven't we, Jane?" And he took my arm with an air of appropriation that was positively exasperating. "She came across this morning to use her influence with me for a friend in trouble. I needn't say that she succeeded, and we're on our way to give him the good news. We shall catch you up almost before you can be back at Ellery."

Josephine turned her head away with a look which implied she didn't believe a word of it. It is true she could hardly have recognised any more than I did the motive of Sydney's scheme. But common sense might have told her that I shouldn't have chosen the High Street on Sunday morning for the scene of an assignation.

After this, in our progress down the street, there was not one of all his friends and acquaintances whom Sydney allowed to pass him without a word

of greeting, introducing and parading me before each one of them as if I were the captive of his bow and spear.

Even when we confronted the Rector and his daughter, he met them wholly unabashed, with the self-same tale or rather a more elaborate one. "It's not often I care to lose one of your sermons, sir, but to-day Jane and I have been on an errand of mercy. And I'm sure you'll be the first person to say we may be excused now and then an attendance at church for the purpose of practising what we have been taught in it."

I don't believe for a moment that the Rector would have said it or thought it. For both he and his daughter regarded church-going as the very hall-mark of a Christian—the one unmistakable evidence of the higher life.

At last our mission was ended, though I was too much discomfited to extract any pleasure from my client's gratitude and thanks. My face burned

with shame as the thought of it all came back to me, and I wondered what construction Walter would put upon it, if by any unfortunate accident it should come to his ears.

But, in spite of my disquietude, it had not dawned upon me as yet that this was the first act in Sydney's scheme for creating an estrangement between Walter and me.

CHAPTER XI.

TO-DAY has been a red-letter day with me, though the old Romans (by a prettier fancy, I think) would have marked it with a *white* stone. At any rate I have had my first letter from Walter—my first real love letter from *anyone*. And it contains in it at least one paragraph that has exceedingly comforted my heart. For I know at last that I have no rivals to fear—at least within the compass of the yacht. I am so proud of my letter that I must e'en give it you in full, though personally I detest the introduction of letters in a story.

"Cadiz,

"Hotel de Paris.

"My Pretty Jane,

"I mean too 'my dearest Jane,' which goes without saying. But I cannot continue my quotation with any regard for truth. 'Oh! never look so shy' wouldn't be descriptive of you, indeed of either of us, at our first meeting, for I was far the worse, though I cherish the belief that you gave me a hint even then that I had found favour in your eyes. We've had a nice time so far: the Bay of Biscay was like a duck pond, indeed I have never found it otherwise. And we've a nice party on board, including (humbly) myself. But we want a lady badly—at least I want one particular lady. So remember, Jane, *remember* that you needn't be afraid for your truant. No: Robson, his brother and myself form the sole company. And, if only you were with us, Jane, I'd be

content to sail on and on into the Unknown for ever and for ever. We are only here for a day or two to give me time to sketch. Possibly I may get one or two subjects—a pretty head, for instance, peeping out of the *persiennes*, as they do here, and as Rosina does in the opening of the *Barber of Seville*. Now don't get jealous again. I won't speak to her, I promise you, or even look at her more than I can help. Not but what the Cadisian ladies *are* pretty, I admit. But then it is only in one particular line, the black-eyed raven-haired type, wherein the Janet of my choice can hold her own against them all. If a fair-haired lady should come on board, I'll give you full and particular notice. Till then,

Yours for always,

WALTER."

A nice letter, isn't it? One that any *fiancée*, I think, might be proud to receive. And I

dismissed Mary and all her vain imaginings straightway from my thoughts, and wrote him there and then the answer his letter had deserved, to meet him at his next place of call: it was Genoa, I think.

After that, life at Ellery sped evenly on, and brought nothing with it worth recording in my diary, had I followed the fashion of the day in adopting that self-repeating soul-depressing record of thread-bare memories.

Nothing—till the day of a certain call which I had to pay on Sir Rolf at the Manor House. Sydney, by the way, was away again in town. He had, as you know, been always a puzzle to me: but to-day the puzzle was to be solved in part and a clearer ray of light thrown upon his character. In his stead I met a London friend of his, who began by congratulating me heartily on the opening that Walter had secured abroad. "And he owes it all" he added "to that good cousin of

his. I am sure no cousin of mine would have taken half the trouble for me that Sydney did for him."

"It is news to me" I answered "that Sydney took much trouble in the matter. I had always understood that the offer dropt into his hands."

"Don't you believe it" he replied. "Sydney, in the kindness of his heart, may hide from you the trouble he had in getting it. If so, it's only fair to him that you should learn the truth. I met him at his club, fagged out (he told me) with the hardest day's work he had ever done in his life. He had been on a round of visits to all the rich friends of his acquaintance, to see if any of them would take Walter in hand and give him a lift on his way. And just at the finish, when he was well nigh desperate, he had called on Robson as his last chance, and got him to throw over a friend to whom he had promised the berth, and give it instead to Walter."

There was plenty in this to give me pause. Allowing for Sydney's possible modesty—a virtue I must admit with which I had never credited him before—here was a statement in direct contradiction with the account that he himself had given us. Why on earth should he have acted thus and then deliberately concealed it, unless—and I could not even now believe it—he had a reason of his own for removing Walter from his path?

But Sir Rolf, when he came into the room and had got a quiet word with me, was incidentally to supply the motive. "By the bye, Jane," he said, "don't let Sydney get too fond of you or you of him. He's a little attracted in your direction, unless I'm much mistaken, and only wants a slight encouragement to make him throw over Josephine —a good girl and I would not have her hardly treated. Believe me, Jane, you've got the better man, though it seems hard of me to say it. And don't worry yourself, dear, over the hint I've given

you. You are too good a woman and too fond of Walter to be influenced by money, though there are plenty of weaker ones who would be tempted by the attractions of an only son."

Conscious that I wasn't in the least degree one of these weaker women, I found it easy to comfort him. At the same time, all these revelations were disquieting, if the word is not too strong to suggest the situation. That a rupture with Walter should ever come from my side, was wholly and absolutely impossible. Nor did I believe, for a moment, in the cleverness of Sydney's schemes, if indeed he had any, as capable of effecting anything to the detriment of our love.

But I was not to be let off so easily. In the next few weeks I began to find myself troubled by the persistent attentions of Sydney himself. I might no doubt be mistaken, but surely, *surely* we two were meeting unaccountably often. I could hardly take a step outside the park, hardly a

step indeed within it, without coming across him at every turn. As a rule, I grant, he had some good reason to give for our meeting. Usually it was to tell me news of Walter, or show me a letter he had received from him. But, as time went on, he abandoned even these small pretences, and lay in wait for me openly in all my own particular haunts, once going so far as actually to invade my nook on the sands, where his unwished-for presence was a nuisance to all three of us, Adelaide, Judy and me.

Finally, I had to reckon with Josephine, who each day became crosser and more "grumpy" (I can find no other word for it), so far as her well-regulated nature could display these attributes. She had got wind, I felt sure, of our meetings, and, naturally enough, resented them. If only I could have persuaded her how little she had to fear from me!

But the climax of my troubles came from Mary—

once my familiar friend but now become a very thorn in my side to prick and buffet me.

"They *do* say, Miss, down in the village (this in the evenings when she had me under her hands and I couldn't escape from her) that you're in a difficulty between the two of them: that Mr Sydney is so set upon you that you will have to throw over the other and marry him, whether you like it or no. Mr Sydney's that determined on it, and, even from a child, he's always got what he wanted. Though, for my own part—not that I would venture to advise you, Miss—I'd hold to Mr Walter if I were you. He mayn't be so rich, but he's ever so much nicer than Mr Sydney, of whom by the way there's strange talk in the village. Not that I would repeat it, Miss, for your hearing."

"That'll do, Mary, that'll do," I answered, sorely driven by my tormentor. "And remember your place, before you retail me all this village gossip and talk of things that don't concern you. Not

but what you can tell anyone who asks you that I wouldn't throw over Mr Walter for any man in the world. And, what's more, that I wouldn't marry Mr Sydney, if there were no other man to be found in it who would give me a choice."

At any rate, I felt that Mary was convinced: this one small grain of comfort had resulted from our interview.

CHAPTER XII.

"HAVE I been so unfortunate as to offend you, Jane?" was Sydney's first question, as I came full upon him one day just outside the lodge gate on my way to the sea with Judy. Adelaide, as it happened, was not with me. She had been called away that morning to superintend the preparations for a dinner party at the Manor House. "It may be my fancy, but I can't help thinking that you are persistent in avoiding me. (Yes, thought I, as persistent as you are in hunting me down). As neighbours, who will soon be united by closer ties, you and I ought surely to be friends."

"Yes: I suppose I ought not to be offended, Sydney. On the contrary, you've been very good in bringing me news of Walter. Only, you see, the people in the village are beginning to connect our names in a way that neither you nor I intend, and that might prejudice me with Walter, if it were to meet his ears."

He did not rise to the opportunity I offered him of declaring his purpose. "My cousin is a lucky man," was all he said, "and I hope will show himself worthy of such affection. But 'fair and fickle'—you know the proverb—and, between you and me, Walter has always had a reputation for fickleness. Already a report has reached me that a very charming young lady has joined the company on board the yacht. But it is hardly fair to tell you more of what I heard of her."

"No: I should think not," was my reply. "And, what is more, Sydney, you might find better work to do than suggesting evil of your

cousin. Not that I believe it for a moment: at least the inference you mean me to draw from it. And if he has anything of the kind to tell me, I feel sure he will write it me himself."

He looked at me with his evil smile, the smile I had learnt so cordially to distrust. "For all that," he answered, "you may find before long that I am right."

And, with this parting shaft, he turned away and relieved me of his company. But not before he had succeeded in making me uncomfortable, if that was his object; the more so because I felt within me the dawn of a suspicion that a fraction at least of his story might possibly be true.

The party at the Manor House that evening had been convened to meet a famous sportsman who had lately returned from the East with a record score of tigers to his credit. Personally I did not anticipate much enjoyment from the party, notwithstanding I was so warmly given, or so my

aunt assured me, to the pleasures of the table. The lover, who had made my evening so pleasant to me months and months ago, was very far away from me to-day instead of being my allotted partner at the feast. Worse still: in default of him, there was at least a chance that I might fall into the hands of Sydney—a contingency I most devoutly hoped to avoid. At the first I had begged hard for leave of absence. But Mrs Ellery wouldn't hear of it for a moment. "Sir Rolf," she told me, "would be badly put out by the absence of his favourite." So I dressed myself in what came handiest without any regard to the effect. I would not even add the blossom of hibiscus to my hair. "Why should I trick and tire myself," I muttered, "when there will be no one there to whom I care to show myself at my best?"

In many ways, all but the most important one to me, the present party reproduced the details of the past, at any rate in its more noticeable

features. Only fortunately I escaped the hands of Sydney, and was placed in charge of a suave young officer who had been imported from the adjoining garrison. He was at any rate amusing, and, to his credit, much less forward in his advances than my acquaintance of the sands. Nor did he talk to me on my own level as Walter would have done. On the contrary, he chatted down to me from some superior height, with a queer little dignity that was infinitely diverting.

"I suppose, Miss Thornton," he began, "you didn't see much life abroad—reared up, I imagine, in some dull village or cathedral town, where you never saw a stranger from one year's end to another. And cathedrals *are* dull, don't you think? Church-hunting is an amusement which quickly palls on me."

"Ah! but I have been at Nice, remember. Only unhappily there are no cathedrals there—nothing like Amiens and Rheims and Rouen. But,

on the other hand, plenty of balls and concerts and theatricals. And occasionally, very occasionally, I dropt in at the Casino and punted a little. (I was romancing in some degree, it is true, but it was all on his account. It was good for him, I felt sure, to be reminded of his place).

"By Jove, Miss Thornton," and my little officer's eyes opened wider and wider, till I thought they would have been set in one perpetual stare, "you *have* seen life and no mistake. I am afraid you must find it rather dull here by comparison." My friend, you see, had travelled down his ladder as rapidly as would a small monkey—which, indeed, he not very remotely resembled.

"Not at all," I answered; "I have learnt to adapt myself to my surroundings." And then my heart took pity on him—I saw he meant so kindly—and we chatted together most amicably during the remainder of dinner.

In the drawing room again the scene of a year past repeated itself with an almost terrible monotony. Josephine once more played "The Moonlight" and I had to show off my singing—not by a repetition of "My Pretty Jane," but by songs which had no possible connection with my memories of Walter. Worst of all, my interview with the Rector was re-enacted with a servile fidelity. So soon as I had left the piano, he sloped at once to my corner and, under pretence of congratulations, took a vacant seat beside me which I had unhappily forgotten to guard.

"My dear young friend," he began, as if he were continuing without a check the catechism of the past. (And how I *do* wish he wouldn't call me his 'dear young friend.' I feel as if my hair had been let down anew). "And how goes the world with you?" he continued unctuously. "Still with your heart in your work, I was glad to see, when

I met you this evening coming out of widow Staunton's door."

"Yes, I had stayed to have tea with her. She wanted comfort badly for the loss of that poor son of her's who killed himself with drink."

"And so you read to her and talked to her, I hope. For they say she is not free from a tendency that way herself."

"No: I didn't do *that*. But I cheered her a little, I hope, by telling her what Kingsley says of that and still worse cases—that, however poor a success he had made of things in this world, he might find himself in a position to do better in the next."

"Oh! dear," he said. "You meant well no doubt, but such teaching, remember, is quite unorthodox."

"And then I went on to old Mrs Benson's cottage, and found her in almost equal trouble for

the loss of her favourite cat. 'Perhaps,' I told her, 'and probably too, I think, you will have it with you again in the next life.' You see the fact that she misses it so *very* much is perhaps the strongest argument that it will be given back to her again. Besides we are told are we not? that all the animals will live again, pleasantly tamed and domesticated too. Else it will be no new Creation, no Renewal of all things."

"Dear, dear," he said, "that's worse and worse. How far you are straying from the truth. It's imagery, pure imagery, but of a very beautiful character, I grant."

"Well, it seems to me to read like plainest matter of fact. Besides, I thought you held to a literal interpretation, and made no allowance for the imagery of the East?"

"Not quite that," he said. "But we'll wait, I think, and discuss these subjects at a more convenient season."

"Ah! that's what Felix or Festus said, or somebody whose name began with an F."

It will be seen from the above that I was in a captious, cantankerous frame of mind, and contradiction always aggravates it, even when, as too seldom happens, it comes with knowledge and from one who has the right to inflict it. Life, as it seems to me, is too short for the practice of this particular virtue. Not one question in a thousand is important, and, even when it is, the contradiction is only the more obnoxious and but seldom profitable in its results. Better leave your friends, I think, to find out where they are wrong by the teaching of their own experience. Above all, leave them to their harmless belief that the creatures they have loved in this world will be restored to them in the next. At the least, the probability lies on their side, seeing that God is Love.

It was not to be supposed that a humble personage like myself would be introduced to the

lion of the occasion till later on in the evening. As a matter of fact, it was not till the party was actually dispersing that Sydney brought him up to me and made the formal speech of introduction. "Our guest, Miss Thornton, has met a friend of ours during his travels abroad and is anxious to assure you of his welfare."

"Yes, Miss Thornton, I am glad to be able to tell you that Mr Walter Weston was in the best of health and thoroughly enjoying his trip when I met him at Singapore before I left for home. He and his friends, the Robsons, were just starting for a cruise in the Malay Archipelago. Indeed, they were only waiting to take a lady friend of the Robsons on board, who was to travel with them for her health." And after a few more words the great man bowed graciously to me and withdrew.

"You see I was not quite out of my reckoning," whispered Sydney, the evil smile full on his face.

"You would have done better, perhaps, to wait for me."

Not yet, it was clear, had he recognised the impossibility of winning me from Walter. A wilful, head-strong man, of extraordinary determination, he had never known defeat and would not realise it even now. A few days later the disillusion was to come to him—sudden, sufficient, so that even he could neither doubt nor question. And when it came—what then? Well, I had refused his love and, if he had damaged a life or two in attempting to force it on me, such contingencies, I suppose, are inevitable in love and war.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE next morning my letter came and scattered all my fears.

Nothing could be franker or truer-hearted than the tone in which he writes. "The fair-haired girl has come on board at last and, if you wish to know the truth, I rather like her. At any rate, she will help to brighten us up, for we were getting rather tired of our limited company (reads like a prospectus, doesn't it?) Yes: I certainly welcome her—in default, that is, of the dearer little woman whom 'I left behind me.'"

And then he went on to tell me how her advent had come about. Her father, for whom she had

been keeping house, was a widower with a high appointment—that of civil judge—in India. A few months back the daughter had caught malaria and been ordered a long cruise among the islands for the recovery of her strength. Meanwhile she was waiting in Singapore at a friend's house for the arrival of a steamer. As it happened, Walter's party were bound in the same direction, Java, Sumatra and Celebes being the next places of call. So when Mr Robson, who was an old friend of her father, had invited her to join their party, she had been ready enough to exchange the discomforts of a steamer for the comparative luxury of the yacht.

"And now," wrote Walter, "we are off for the islands, every scene in which will give me a picture —and then away to the home of the Paradise birds, of which I'll paint you a set of miniatures that shall exhaust all the resources of my colour-box."

Of course I shewed the letter to Ada—she was the receiver of all my confidences—who was as certain as I was that I had nothing to fear from the "fair-haired girl" of whom he wrote so freely.

Unluckily for my comfort, I must needs read a scrap of the letter to Mary as well. I felt so happy and self-confident that I could not refrain from trampling on her suspicions. Whereby pride and self-content had a grievous fall, for she interpreted it, as I might naturally have expected, after a method the reverse of mine.

"Didn't I tell you so, Miss? And isn't it coming off exactly as I said? Right as right can be, till they miss their fancy girl and another one comes in their way. And oh dear! on board a ship together, too—for months and months perhaps. Why, sailors have told me—I kept company with a sailor once ('and with three, or was it four besides, Mary?' I thought), and he told me they would make love to anyone at sea,

no matter how old and ugly she might be. Yes, Miss, I hope I'm wrong, but I'm terribly afraid you'll find Mr Walter marrying that fair-haired, pleasant-mannered girl. Why, you see he finds her good company already."

"Oh! Mary, Mary," I groaned in the bitterness of my soul: "you're incorrigible. Never, *never* again shall you have confidence of mine." But I knew in my heart that I had deserved it all.

In the afternoon I met Sydney, who asked me, with an affectation of much interest, whether I had received my letter by the Indian mail. "Yes," I answered him, shortly and sharply, for my temper was gone and I was vexed at falling into the hands of a fresh tormentor, "Yes, and it explains everything fully and completely, as I was sure it would." And with that I turned abruptly from him.

Till then, I think, he had intended to spare me, but a shadow came across his face, as he saw my

movement, and, taking a letter from his pocket, he placed it in my hands. It was his Parthian shaft —the weapon which a coward launches in his flight. The letter was from Mr Robson and had been forwarded by a passing steamer.

"Dear Sydney (it ran):—

"Our trip, so far, has been a great success. How fortunate you came to me in time, for Walter has proved the very man I wanted. So lively and companionable—and such an artist! I'm afraid it has been a little dull for him hitherto, but I've got a pretty and pleasant companion for him now, Miss Richardson by name, of whom perhaps you may have heard. They make out the days together in sketching and music, and now he's teaching her to paint miniatures and portraits. A very interesting couple to watch—as good as a stage play for us, the lookers-on. But wasn't there a little girl in your parts of whom they told me he was fond? If so, I tremble for her

chance, and hope he has not gone too far with her."

Sydney had played another of his trump cards, and played it well. But it fared no better than the rest of them. For he laboured under the radical delusion that, if he could only separate me from Walter, I should "en revanche" fall to him. Wherein he was grievously mistaken, as Mary could have told him if he had taken the notion of consulting her.

It disquieted me, I grant, but not in the direction he intended or for the reason he had hoped. And I must tell you now the real direction of my fear.

There had been a postscript in Walter's letter, of which I would fain not have told you—I would fain not tell you now. But it is impossible, I find, to withhold any confidences from my reader. How else shall he understand the progress of my little drama—so little in the telling, so all-important to

me who played in it? So I will e'en make a clean breast of it. His letter had ended with a word of warning on my own account. He had heard, he said, from many quarters—from Caroline herself (I had long ago discounted her malicious scheme) and also from independent persons, whose honesty he could not question, that I was over much in Sydney's company and that he was making no secret of his intent to win me. "Even Robson" he added "was struck from the very first by the persistency with which Sydney hunted him up, and urged my claims to be taken on this cruise. And remember, *remember* (he added) all that I have told you of him—that he is never to be trusted. He starts, I feel, with every advantage—position, money, looks, with everything I lack. And when I think of all his life, made up of schemes and schemes which never fail, I tremble for my little simple-hearted girl whom I have left, alone and unprotected without a friend to help and counsel

her. But you will not listen to him, Jane—I am sure you will not listen. I tell myself a hundred times a day my little lover will be true as steel."

CHAPTER XIV.

I AM flattening my nose against the window-pane in a vain attempt to extract hope from a day of hopeless gloom and depression. Adelaide is playing on the hearthrug with Judy and the cats, and my remaining cousins are pasting covers on a new series of tracts. We are all in the dining room, as was necessitated by the messy nature of their work. The parrot formed the only centre of enlivenment. "Polly wants her lunch! Judy, *Judy*, that's Mrs Ellery's cat! My *dearest* Jane!" were sentences that fell from her in quick succession, varied with scraps of nigger melodies.

For she was tired of the general silence, and never tired of hearing her own voice.

"What are you going to wear, Jane, at the Hunt Ball next Thursday?" asked Josephine. Caroline rarely spoke to me, and, after the information supplied in Walter's letter, I did not press my conversation upon her. It was a mutual league of silence;

> "And, as I never speak to her,
> She never speaks to me."

"As a matter of fact, I have nothing I could wear except that old frock of last season. Not that it matters much, seeing I don't intend to be there. I don't believe in going to big dances, when Walter's all that distance off."

"What did I hear, Jane? Not going to the Hunt Ball? I must get my father to talk to you on that subject." Sydney was the speaker. He had come in upon us suddenly through the conservatory door which opened into the adjoining room.

The Hunt Ball, be it known, was our one great and particular dissipation in the course of the year. It was given at the Manor House, Sydney himself being the M.F.H., and no one, within a twelve mile radius, of the faintest pretension to position or influence would have dreamed of missing it.

"She says it's because Walter's away, but it's really because she has nothing to wear," was Caroline's frank explanation, under cover of which I made my escape by a flank movement to the conservatory, as was my usual custom when Sydney obtruded his presence upon me.

When Thursday came, I found Sydney, as usual, in possession of the field, and my aunt made a special point of my being present at the ball. I went up wearily to my room to dress, for the weather had depressed me, and Walter's letters of late had been by no means encouraging. Perhaps, too, I was down-hearted (woman-like) because, as

Caroline had candidly put it, I had nothing to wear. If so, my depression ought to have taken flight on the instant. For there, before my eyes, outspread on the counterpane before me, lay a vision of beauty, a ball dress that might have roused any woman from the very depths of despair. It was a study in palest green, the tint of a shallow midsummer sea with its green seaweeds reflected from below, and over it crept lace in wavelets to simulate the lines and curves of rippling foam. "How good of Sir Rolf," I thought, for I had little doubt the present was from him. He knew, none better, that my £50 of pin money couldn't have extended to anything like that. But how had he managed the fitting and the making? Oh, through my aunt, no doubt, who could easily have sent the dressmaker a pattern. In which latter conclusion, I was not so very far wrong.

As soon as I was ready, I looked at my reflection in the glass, and marvelled. Truly this was

another and a different woman from her whom Walter had painted for me not so many months ago. The large black eyes, it is true, were still the dominant feature. But the sharpened outlines had filled in around them: the sallow complexion had passed into a soft Italian olive. The small child-like face smiled at me out of a wealth of dusky hair, and in the eyes there was the far-off, wistful look that comes of long weariness and waiting; but it gives, by way of recompense, the crowning charm of interest when it comes. Truly, I thought, Walter would have been satisfied to-night: I have improved upon his portrait.

And as I lifted the flowers which accompanied the dress, a splendid group of maidenhair and orchids, a card displayed itself within their midst: "to complete the toilet.—S.W." It was a bad mistake of his, since, but for the card, I should have accepted it without scruple as his father's gift. Indeed, under other circumstances, I should

have accepted it from either of them, for, since my engagement to Walter, I had been treated by everyone at the Manor House as a member of the family.

Of course, I discarded everything at once—a little regretfully, I think; could any woman have done otherwise?—and, scrambling hastily into a last year's frock of very questionable make, was only just in time to join my aunt and cousins in the hall.

My aunt, I thought, looked tired and listless, as if she were fulfilling some appointed task for which she had neither the inclination nor the strength. But I saw a smile pass between my cousins as they recognised my time-worn raiment, and contrasted with it their own equipment fresh down from Bond Street.

"Really," I thought, as I studied Josephine, "I have done you scant justice hitherto. Given a measure of excitement, you are neither of you

unpresentable women. The expectation of the ball had transformed them from their primness and, in their perfectly fitting frocks of delicate lavender, they looked so radiantly happy as to be positively handsome. Yes, except to a prejudiced eye, they were both of them fine women. Only they had to be startled out of themselves by some strong stimulus of excitement before they made the spectator realise it.

We were among the latest arrivals, and, as we passed into the ballroom, at the door of which stood Sydney and his father welcoming their guests, one spark of baffled rage leapt into his eyes as they fell upon my dress. Another moment and he was the courteous host again, greeting us with a graceful dignity in which, little as I liked him, I had never seen his rival.

Nor did he ever allude by so much as a word, in my hearing, to his gift and its rejection, though I danced with him more than once in the course of

the evening by way of proving to the curious eyes around me that I made no distinction between him and the rest of my acquaintance.

The dance was an early one—many of the company having long distances to drive—and, punctually at two o'clock, in accordance with a time-honoured custom, the guests began to group themselves for the country-dance which always closed the evening.

I had fortunately been forewarned that the dance in question was to be led by Sydney, and that his wealth and position, together with his avowed intention to marry, would call particular attention to the partner of his choice. So when he came up through the long room in our direction with every eye upon him, and, passing Josephine who was seated in the line of his progress, appealed to me, I was ready with an answer and declined on the score of fatigue. This time his eye betrayed no symptom of emotion: he had schooled himself

too well by now. He did not, as I expected, and as a weaker man would have done, retrace his steps to Josephine, but selected for his partner the plainest and most unattractive damsel in the company who was sitting a few paces beyond me, as if he would intimate to all matrons who were present with marriageable daughters that his matrimonial tendencies were in abeyance for the time.

And then dear old Sir Rolf came up to us with a kindly word of parting, especially addressing himself to me. "I knew my little Jane would think better of it and come," he said. "Where else could we have found such a pretty dark-eyed contrast for our florid complexions and gorgeous display of pink?"

His son followed him with a phrase or two of studied courtesy. Then he turned from me to whisper a few words to Josephine which reconciled her, or so it seemed to me, to the disappointments of the evening.

For myself, I had passed already out of his life. He had played his last card, and it had failed him like the rest. Will it pleasure him, I wonder, in the days that are to come to know that, at the least, it compassed his revenge?

CHAPTER XV.

AFTER the ball a pause ensued in what I had begun to recognise was a trial of endurance between myself and Sydney. And it was exactly at this point—the crucial one as it proved of our encounter—that I made my great and irretrievable mistake.

Tired by the excitement of the ball and by the moves and counter-moves that had passed between us that evening, I took my ease on the following day, and, under the impression perhaps that my victory had been complete and overwhelming, abandoned myself to the luxury of a false repose. Whereby I committed a fatal error, for I lost the

Indian mail. Not that I have ever been able to satisfy myself that, if I had shaken off my lethargy and written then and there to Walter, I could have saved the position. No: the plans and tactics of the enemy were too deeply laid and too inscrutable for that. Besides, Walter's own movements were so erratic, and the times and places where a mail would reach him so impossible of calculation, that no one could have asserted positively that my dilatoriness of that one day was fatal. But, at any rate, it lost me my best chance. Perhaps the enemy was more wide-awake and more determined than I, and therefore better befriended of fortune. Or else, it may be, he had a clearer and more definite knowledge of Walter's destination and ports of call, and could therefore time his communications more accurately than I could. At any rate, from whatever cause and whether for good or evil, I never wrote that day, and when, with much self-condemnation and contrition of

heart, I finally posted my letter, it was to find that it had lost the mail.

Whether it would have effected its purpose and produced conviction—altering thereby the course of our two lives—even if it had reached him in time, I cannot say. The uncertainty underlying the situation lay in the question how far, at this date, he would himself have *wished* to be convinced.

When at last the letter did go, it took with it an account in detail of the Hunt Ball—of all that preceded it and all that took place at it, together with a full report of Sydney's gift and its instant rejection, and how I had refused to become his partner in the special dance of the evening. What I added on my own account, I have studiously forgotten; it lay only between him and me. But it was a complete and (so far as I could make it) a convincing re-assurance of my unaltered, unalterable love. "And, oh! Walter (I ended), do, I implore you, return my confidence by trusting me

as implicitly as I trust you. How ever else are we to wear through the years that may still remain for us before I see you home again? *Do* resolve, if only in justice to me, to ignore, once and for all, these idle rumours that come drifting to you wholly without truth, from where and whom I cannot tell, which my own poor words seem powerless to combat, but which I could dispel for ever by just one look into your eyes."

The writing of this letter had brought me comfort, and I gladly welcomed Ada's inspiration that we should spend the afternoon in a long walk to the further end of Judy's play-ground, where the expanse of yellow sand loses itself in a monotonous, low-lying marsh, half covered with the tide. "Monotonous" have I called it? Let me recall the word as soon as written. For no spot on God's earth ever shone with brighter and more gorgeous colours for at least three-quarters of the year. It was the walk in all the

neighbourhood that we three loved best—for Judy shared our interest—because, as if to show what she can do where the hand of man is powerless, Nature, in each successive period of the year, lavished on this desolate region a specimen of her most perfect handiwork.

No sooner had May come than she began by carpeting it all with a sheen of thrift—not a plant or two here and there as you may see it transplanted, forlorn and woe-begone, into some cottage garden, but acres upon acres of delicate pink tufts, so thickly matted that one had perforce to trample on the blossoms, a necessity which I always regarded in the light of a crime.

And, when the glorious sheen of pink had passed, as it did with the coming of July, Nature had yet a second marvel in reserve and covered the pincushions of withered thrift with a liver-wort of gold, not so daintily captivating as the thrift,

but better suited to the suns of August, and making a very mirror for the reflection of their rays. To-day both thrift and liver-wort had long been gone, so, as if to show that her resources were not exhausted yet, and that she had other glories in reserve, she had been at work again and had decked her "Garden of Allah" with its final robe of crimson glass-wort, which, in the sunset of the winter evening, glowed red and lurid as a lake of blood.

How Ada and I revelled in the sight of it! It was useless to pick it, and it was a sin to walk on it, except for Judy, who had no such scruples and hunted it all over for mice which I do not think were there. The only representative of the family that she discovered was a flittermouse, head downwards for its afternoon nap. I think her passion for capturing flying creatures must have been derived from her grandsire, the fox. But in the present instance the capture was not

a success, for the flittermouse, resenting the interference, made fast to her nose like a rat.

"Do you know," said Ada, "I really believe that Sydney and Josephine will come together after all? He was closeted with her all the morning and, when he left her, she came out radiant with delight. I never saw her look so really pretty. It was as though she had seen a vision and was in contemplation of it still."

"That's the best news, Addie, I've heard for many a day. If he's got his heart's desire, he'll give up spreading evil reports of me, and I can hope that Walter and I may be left in peace for the remainder of his time abroad."

"Yes, Jane, I'm heartily glad of it for your sake, though the wonder of it still remains. Were ever two people so unevenly yoked? Why, I've heard him tell her again and again that, once married, he'll stop her visiting and never let her deliver a tract again. Fancy a man of his

temperament tying himself to a woman of hers!"

"Never trouble yourself, Addie. They are old enough to know their own minds, and I'm far too thankful for the news to speculate about its causes and results."

For indeed I was far too happy to trouble myself about anything to-day. Addie's news had cleared my way so hopefully.

And the sun was bright, and the glass-wort looked like sheets of glowing coral, and the wind swept straight in our faces from the broad Atlantic.

Only that Judy seemed strangely tired with her long hunting in the glass-wort after imaginary mice. She crept to me at last, and looked up wistfully in my face, and asked to be carried for a while.

She had never asked me to carry her before.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE days of winter wore on slowly and sullenly to me, for my letters from abroad were few and far between, and, though I tried hard to explain their irregularity by the difficulties of postage, I was not always successful, even to myself. Worse still, when they did come, they were shorter and more indefinite—not true love letters at all, I thought—dealing simply with the progress and incidents of the tour, and saying nothing of the "fair-haired girl" of whom, with the eagerness of jealousy for self-inflicted torture, I was craving to hear more details.

Surely this was sorrow enough, even if there had been nothing else to trouble me. But worse, far worse, was the fact that no single letter came that did not harp on the same old grievance—my constant meetings and companionship with Sydney. It was in vain I contradicted all his inferences, again, again and yet again. The wearisome reiteration came ever from across the seas, repeated like a parrot's cry, till at last I abandoned protest in despair, feeling that it was useless to struggle against fate, and that Sydney himself, or one or other of his friends, would win the day and end by separating us.

Yes: Ada and Judy were, I saw, the only two friends that Sydney and his schemes would spare me. No, I had forgotten Sir Rolf—of him, too, I felt sure: no slander or calumny would ever win his heart from me. I might reckon, for always, on three faithful friends. And who, I thought, can reckon on more?

For one small mercy more I was thankful: Sydney had ceased from troubling me.

And so I waited on, almost as one without hope —and, one day, the letter I had been expecting came.

"Oh! Jane," it said, "why have you done this? And I had trusted you so entirely. Why have you wrecked our happiness thus, for I am sure you loved me once? Is it Sydney's wealth and position that have tempted you? You need only to have waited and I would have given you all these and more—a truer-hearted love than he can ever give. Even now I would believe nothing of all they tell me, if only it were possible. Caroline's insinuations were as nothing to me, for I knew their motive, but now a letter has reached me from your aunt herself which makes doubt impossible. You are to wear his gift, she tells me, and dance with him as his accepted lover on the night of the Hunt Ball. What can I do,

Jane, but give you your release? Oh! Jane, Jane, I love you now—love you when it is a shame to say it, for I am pledged to another girl. Forgive me, if you feel that I, too, have cause to ask forgiveness. But, Jane, you had left me, oh! so lonely—with nothing, it seemed, to look or hope for in the future. And I had learned to love Miss Richardson—not with my first and truest love: that was given long ago on the sands by Ellery Hall—but with a love that, if less passionate than ours, shall last, I hope, for life. Oh, Jane! my love, my love!"

Without a moment's deliberation, I went straight to my aunt's room, the open letter in my hand.

She hardly looked surprised at my visit—perhaps she was expecting it. The Indian mail is timed so accurately now that the arrival of a letter can be calculated almost to an hour. And she must have known what it would bring. No: she was certainly not surprised, but oh! so tired

and worn, so different from the aunt who had confronted me in the same room a year before with a stern rebuke for my forwardness with Walter. Oh! Walter, shall I ever forget our first meeting on the sands? Never, while life shall last. It is one of the few short hours that have become a record in my life, in company with half a dozen other trivial memories that, for no earthly reason I can see, have claimed for themselves a lodging in my brain.

With that acute perception of trifling details which is the inexplicable accompaniment of a great excitement, I had noticed as I came in that the parrot had been carefully removed—another symptom, or so I read it, that my aunt had anticipated my coming.

"Why did you do it?" I asked abruptly, placing in her hand the open letter.

She hardly glanced at it—enough perhaps to recognise that stamp and envelope were from

abroad. She looked indeed too tired and listless for any strong emotion, like one who had worn through a long period of anxiety and had no strength in her for combat now.

"Why did I do it, Jane?" she said, echoing my question as one might fancy a sleep-walker would echo it, without the faintest tone of life or interest.

"I did it," she continued, "because I had to do it." My anger rose at the irrelevance of her reply, banishing the pity which, in spite of all that she had wrought me, had been stirred by the sight of her pale worn face and almost vacant stare.

"*What?* you had to wreck my life, and Walter's too, for all you knew, when you had seen how dearly we loved each other! Oh! it was cruel, too cruel of you. I did not know you saintly women were so cruel."

She winced at the taunt, of which, even as I uttered it, I had bitterly repented.

"Forgive me, aunt," I cried, "forgive me: I did not mean it. You have always been kind to me, kinder than to any one, and you welcomed Walter too so warmly," as memory after memory rose within my mind of occasions on which she had furthered our love. "I cannot, *cannot* understand it. Who, or what, has compelled you to act so treacherously towards us?"

"Listen, Jane," she said, for I had roused her at last, though she still spoke in the even low-voiced tones that might have come from an automaton. "Listen, and I will tell you all my story. You never knew my husband. He died when you were seven years old. We had been fairly happy together, though parted, widely as the poles, in our religious belief. He was a freethinker—you know what I am. It was long before I knew—indeed, I never knew till he was dead—that, for the last years of his life, he had been a confirmed gambler. His constant visits to London, which he had

explained as business, were all, I discovered too late, in pursuance of his passion. And when he died, he left me practically a ruined woman. Not only had he lost the whole of my large fortune—for only a few thousands remained, with which, as you know, it has been hard to keep up our establishment—but, worse still, he had mortgaged Ellery itself to the uttermost farthing of its value. And who do you think holds the title-deeds of the estate? Why, Sydney. My husband knew Sir Rolf too well to dream of making him his confidant. With Sydney, who had won a portion of the money, he had no such scruples. And it was Sydney who took the mortgage. As the eldest son, and heir by the entail, he had little difficulty in finding the amount. Fortunately he took a fancy for Josephine, and would have married her, if you had stayed away. And then his fancy fell on you, and, if I would do my uttermost to win you for

him, I should hear no more, he promised me, of mortgages or loan.

"I have no more to tell you: I have ruined your happiness and, with it, far more hopelessly, my own."

It was a cruel task to inflict upon a woman who, all her life long, had prided herself on a rigid adherence to duty, so far as her limited intelligence could understand it. But, strange as it may seem, her love for Ellery, gaunt and dilapidated as the buildings were, had been the crowning passion of her life, and Sydney, it was clear, had known and worked upon it.

What could I do but forgive her? She had only been the instrument in stronger hands, and her shame and self-abasement, as she recognised at last the evil she had wrought, were punishment enough, God knows. Who was I that I should make it harder, bitterer still? I had no heart to add an angry or reproachful word.

"I forgive you, aunt," I said, and left her, full of pity for a sorrow that was deeper and more hopeless far than the sorrow she had wrought for me.

CHAPTER XVII.

I HAD anticipated, I think, my sentence before it came. No doubt the long and wearying period of anxiety had, in part, prepared me for it, and, when it came, the first swift sharpness of the blow was past.

What remained for me to face was a life disorganized, a dull monotony of existence projected before me, in all probability, through a vista of long years, out of which the leading motive had been suddenly withdrawn.

But the question of primary importance, and one which I should have to settle quickly, was the

place and manner of this future life, when I should have left Ellery Hall, as I must do so soon as ever my arrangements could be made. I had been used to a humbler life and could take it up again with better spirit than would a girl of less experience. Only one thing really troubled me—what in that case was to become of Judy? It was certain that we two could not be parted during the short remainder of her life. The idea never came within my mental view. Yet how could she be with me if I had to go out for a living into the world around me—to accept, perhaps, a place as singing mistress or governess in some family of strangers? No: I could see no way to it, unless, in recognition of the wrong she had done me, Mrs Ellery would allow me a small sum, enough to ensure the training of my voice, and, this accomplished, so that I could either sing or teach professionally, I could see before me a fairly happy life for me and Judy in some suburban district, where we should

have air, and space to ramble in. Only we should lose our glorious sands and sea.

But all my musings were dispersed by the news which met me in the village.

First and foremost, Walter is come home—but not to me. And only for a week or two at longest, just to arrange his affairs and see his friends, of whom I fancy I shall not be one, before he returns to settle in India where the father of his fiancée has need of her presence. So I shall not be allowed even a sight of her who has supplanted me. Whereon, another difficulty presents itself. Shall I even see *him*, Walter himself, if he urges it, I mean, and claims the right to plead his own defence? There are days when, I think, that my heart has not had time to learn its bitterness—that my wrong will seem the greater, the more I ponder it. Will it be right or wise to meet him, if the evil he has wrought me gathers fresh bitterness as the days roll on? For this is what I fear.

If only I felt I could forgive him, wholly and unreservedly, how gladly I would see him, just for this once again. But he has come too soon, I feel —perhaps not soon enough—for that. The time is past: the time is not yet come for it. I could (or so I tell myself) have done it better at the first, before I had had time to realise my loss, or better still perhaps, when I have had time a little to forget. But, as it seems to me, not now.

This one difficulty excepted, circumstances, I feel, are not adapting themselves amiss.

To start with, Josephine and Sydney have adjusted their little differences—she must be saintlier and humbler than I thought—and have arranged to marry early in the coming month. You see that the bone of contention, my humble self, had suddenly been withdrawn from their midst. My action at the Hunt Ball had spoken to them at last in no uncertain terms. In other ways,

too, matters are shaping themselves distinctly for the best. For a while it seemed as if I were the only one who was to be left out in the cold. But Fate has arranged this too, and very kindly for me, seeing that of course I could not have stayed on at Ellery in company with my aunt. Sydney and his wife, I find, are to leave the Manor House immediately after the marriage, to live at a villa of Sir Rolf's near Nice, safely and comfortably removed from me, and, as my dear old friend cannot be left at the Manor House in care of himself, he must have some one to look after his housekeeping and has summoned his favourite Jane.

So life after all shall not be pleasureless to me—of that I am determined. It may be that the reaction will come, when I have had time to realise my loss. Well, and when it comes, I will live it down and not let it lie, like a shadow, on all my future life. There are pleasures, I feel sure, in

store for me, as for all who care to find them, even when a heart's first passion has been betrayed like mine. Other friendships remain, and others too will come to me, of a higher nobler kind, that will take more to rend them than a whisper or two of scandal drifted across the uncharitable sea. With these, and with Nature, who never fails those who seek her trustfully, I will learn to be content. For have I not Sir Rolf—my dear old friend Sir Rolf—who will have need of me, hale and hearty as he is, and as I hope he will be for years to come? And Ada too, whom I have learned to love so dearly—only separated from me by the narrow lane that parts the Ellery and the Manor House estates. And for my comfort (yes, but for how long?) I have Judy with me—whom I love better than many Christians, better even than I loved my false and truant lover. For Judy too has had a special invitation, written in Sir Rolf's own hand, to accompany me to the Manor House when I go.

Surely never dog in this world had favours in such abundance showered upon her. Only I am haunted by one great fear, that Judy may not long remain to comfort me. There have been signs of late—signs that no one who loves her as I do can fail to read—that the ties which have bound us, heart and soul, for so many years are being slowly severed now. If only I could make her young again—as young relatively as myself. I can see that one year in a dog's life is about equivalent to five of ours. So as Judy is thirteen now, I ought by rights to be verging on sixty-five, and we should have a fair chance then of ending our lives together. But what shall I do, Judy, through all the long years that may, that probably will be, left me to live through when you are gone? "Why, get another dog, to be sure," says a carping critic or well-intentioned friend, who thinks nothing of the years it takes to reach a dog's real heart, even when you have found one that is worth the

winning. And not all dogs are worth the trouble —as neither are all men.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ONE day, only a week later, as I went upstairs to dress for dinner, my friend Mary slipped out of a dark corner on the landing and placed a letter in my hand. It bore no signature but I knew from whom it came.

"Come to me" it said "at nine o'clock this evening—the old place. I must see you once again before I go."

Never, not for a moment now, had I the faintest doubt as to whether I would go. For time, as I feared, had only accentuated my grievance. I could never, I think, have rested, never have slept

peacefully, if I hadn't seen him once again to tell him, face to face with my own lips, all the evil he had wrought me. It was not a Christian feeling, I know—not the forgiveness we are told to cultivate—and I am sorry for it now. But oh! my friends, have pity on me, for the temptation was sore and my provocation had been great. Bear in mind that never, not once during all his absence, had my own heart swerved in its allegiance. He was the only man that I had ever loved: that I ever shall love, I think, now when I am older and know better what a true love means. In spite of the persistency of Sydney and all his friends, I had held unswervingly to my fair and ficklehearted lover—only to find that he had left me, almost without a word, for some newer, nearer friend.

No: it was no small grievance that I was called on to forgive.

Dinner was over at last—it had seemed endless to me with its wearisome round of courses and

dull monotony of talk—and I slipped out of the drawing room with some trivial apology: that I had a headache, I think, or that the room was hot: and, throwing a shawl over my shoulders, ran down the lane that led me in ten minutes to the shore.

The night was as clear as day, for the moon had risen and flung a broad ribbon of light over the breakwater in the distance and the training ships within it, and, nearer still, on the range of coaling hulks, lit up with glaring flames, for their work needed a closer and more concentrated light than the diffusive radiance of the moon.

And in our old original trysting-place—the sandy cove between two jutting rocks—I saw him standing as before, and, only that it was morning then and evening now, it seemed to me that all things were as they were and that we twain "had met and never parted."

He looked hungrily into my face—I thought for

the moment, and shall think so always, that he loved me still—as if trying to read off every lineament and store it in his mind for recollection when he had passed into his far-off world.

And I loved him, yes, I admit it, as I had never loved him before, and would have gone gladly to his arms but for the memory of that fatal barrier which he, of his own free will, had raised between us.

"Forgive me, Jane," he said, "forgive me that I didn't trust your love. I was sorely tried, and I have been sorely punished for my want of faith. But, believe me, it was not all my fault. If you had seen the letters—letters from your friends, from Caroline, from your aunt, at last, herself, all of them telling the same tale, that you had given me up for him, you would have believed, you would have been forced to believe as I did."

"I think not," I answered wearily, with much bitterness of heart—for memory had come back

to me and with it the consciousness of all that I had suffered. "It would have taken more than that to make me believe that my whole heart's trust had been misplaced and betrayed. Women, I know, have an evil reputation for fickleness. But thank heaven! we are not all of us like that. Many, I hope the most, of us can 'love one man and cleave to him' for ever. You see we have less to interest us and occupy our thoughts, so when we give our love we give it wholly and without reserve. Don't think me hard, Walter. I know what temptations absence and perpetual change of scene bring with them. But you might, you might have remembered that I at home had none of all these things. Besides, how often I had told you again and again, by word and in every letter that I wrote, that Sydney was nothing to me, could never have been anything, even if he had come to me with tenfold the so-called advantages that all of you have dinned into my

ears. Oh! I do feel it hard to forgive you. For you have wrecked more than my life and happiness: you have taken with them all my confidence in love and honour too. And I feel to-day as if I should never trust a human being more. Talk of the lower animals—why, dogs are constancy itself compared with men. Do you think Judy would have left me, however much you had made her understand that I loved one of the dogs at Ellery better than herself?"

"But you will try, Jane, at least you will try to forgive me. And when you can tell yourself honestly that you have done so, you will write to me in India just one short line. Remember what I shall be suffering till it comes."

"Yes, I will try, Walter, but do not expect too much from me—above all, not too soon. I must have time, you know, to live down my pride and get used a little to the deadly dulness of my life. With time, I am sure that I can do

it. But remember, remember you must give me time."

"No, Jane," he whispered, in deeper, more impassioned tones, "forgive me now—to-night—before we part. I have the feeling strong upon me that you and I shall never meet again. And you cannot have the heart to leave me in this doubt for weeks and months, before I know that we are at least not enemies. Even now my punishment is sufficient for my sin: you cannot wish to make it heavier than I can bear. Even now, God knows, I would gladly, thankfully cancel the tie that I have formed if only I could win you back to me. But no—I could not call you down to share that deeper shame. Neither, I know, would you consent to share it."

And there and then, even as he was speaking, when I saw how marred and worn he looked in the wan moonlight, I put away my pride and anger from me like a foe with whom I had not strength

to parley. I did not, as I had intended, withhold forgiveness, to think and brood over it for days and nights, and then hand it back to him at last, a poor discredited thing, with all the freshness and the frankness gone from it. No, I forgave him everything, the long days and nights of gradually dying hope and, after that, the deadlier certainty of a wasted, ruined love. Yes, I forgave him everything—wholly and without reserve—as myself shall one day hope to be forgiven.

And a calmer, restfuller look came into his eyes, as he stooped and touched my forehead lightly with his lips, and, without a word, passed out into the darkness that lay beyond the shafts of light.

"JUDY'S GRAVE"

CHAPTER XIX.

'C'EST MON AMI—RENDEZ-LE MOI.'
Old Epitaph.

SO my golden-haired, fickle-hearted lover is gone from me. And almost before I had realised the parting, I was face to face with yet another sorrow: I was to lose a dearer, faithfuller friend.

For Judy, too, is bound on a far journey of her own, and will not wait, I think, to join me in my new-found home.

"Judy," I said, as we lay together on the lawn under the shadow of a huge fir tree, "you are getting old, I'm afraid, little dog. You lie down

more than you did, and look lazy and tired. I wonder, when you go, whether you'll start life afresh in some new world, and whether we two shall find ourselves together again. I'm sure I hope so, for I don't think I could be happy anywhere without you."

Judy regarded me attentively from where she lay on the ground in front of me, the sunlight glowing through her pointed ears as through a pair of delicate shells, showing the tracery of every vein in threads of pink like the fibres that survive in a decayed leaf.

"You know the latest theory, I suppose, Judy, on the subject? That, if we make much of you and tell you everything about ourselves—our sorrows, joys and disappointments—we shall end by giving you something of our own nature, and fitting you for a new and higher life? Though, I'm afraid, after all, you might learn more harm than good from us. You might learn for instance

from some one to drink and gamble and swear, or, perhaps, unfaithfulness, fraud, or hypocrisy, with a hundred other vices we humans could teach you, and you might have ended by becoming mistrustful and selfish instead of devoted and loving. On the whole, I think, you are better as you are, little dog. Of Love that 'suffereth long and never faileth' you are still the truest type, and we your feeble, faltering pupils. But it's a pretty theory, and I hope for my sake it may be true, for no other dog in that case will have had a better chance than you. We've been thirteen years together now, and know all that's happened to each other, and I fancy by some intuitive method you've comprehended the main of it. And you've no great sins on your conscience, of that I'm sure—except perhaps the death of those unhappy hens you buried so laboriously at the edge of the silver sea."

Here Judy fixed her great black eyes more

intently on me, as if to question the delicacy of my reminiscence, then slowly turned on her heels (if indeed a dog performs that evolution) and walked solemnly away from my neighbourhood, as by way of suggesting that the subject was distasteful to her.

* * * * *

There was no longer any doubt of it: Judy was failing fast. I had been loth to curtail her daily walk, the little dog had so enjoyed her ramble by the sea. But she would hang back at starting and tell me almost in words, by a look of human intelligence, that the effort was too great for her. At first, I thought it was some passing weakness, and I would carry her well on the way; after which she would struggle bravely to complete the usual round, and even try a little hunting on the shore with almost her old vivacity—*almost*, but never quite. So each day a fragment of the distance was cut off, till at length it was borne in

upon me that Judy and I would take no walk together more. For it had come now to only a run for half an hour in some adjoining field. Strange to say, she always *ran*. Nothing, even now, could teach her to walk quietly and spare her forces. It was as though she had gathered up some slender stock of strength and, this exhausted, she would creep up to my side and beg to be taken home. Yet she suffered no pain—only a gradual lapse of power, as day after day she lay on the table at my side, stealing up to me from time to time for comfort when the weakness overpowered her.

She never gave in, and never to the end failed to recognise my morning bell, though it is true she could not hurry up the tea and toast with misdirected energy, as had been her custom heretofore. But even at the last she tried—and failed—to mount the stairs, and then asked pitifully to be carried up to me. After that she

and I were together till she died. Towards the evening she turned and looked me in the face, whispering a last good-bye—passing so quietly and painlessly that she had grown cold beneath my hand before I knew that she was gone.

So Judy too is gone from me, and I feel terribly alone. She might have waited, I think, till I had found strength to bear this second blow. But no, Judy: it was kinder of you so. You would only have woven round me at the Manor House the hundred little memories from which at Ellery I am so vainly trying to escape.

Oh! Judy, Judy, shall we meet again, I wonder, in that far-off country, wherein I picture flowers, and fruit, and forest, and—yes—in spite of all they may tell us—the glorious, measureless sea?

> "Perchance, who knows? in blissful days to come,
> Our dim eyes opened, and our story told,
> When broken threads are knitted, and our home
> Made ready, *you* may meet us as of old."

FINIS.

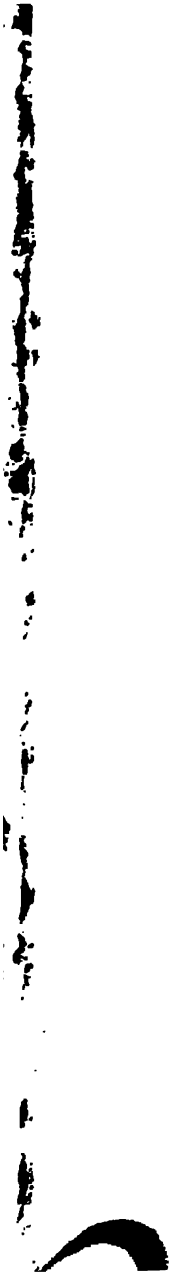
AUTHOR'S POSTSCRIPT

TO many, I am afraid to most, of my readers, my little story will have seemed inconsequent and inconclusive, because it leaves the heroine's life disorganized and fails to round it off with mathematical precision.

But is life indeed so precisely adjusted? well-designed and well-ordered from the cradle to the grave? Isn't it far more often a skein of tangled threads that will not sort themselves on earth—a river that now and again rejoices in its course, only to lose itself the next minute in a dull monotony of sand?

The drama of life is constructed in episodes, the continuity of the purpose being (to our eyes) wanting. So we turn down the page on each one as it finishes, and wait for the next. Till we weary at last of the aimless succession, and are content, I imagine, that the curtain should fall.

Not in this world—in the next we believe—will the aimless find its purpose, the unfinished its conclusion.



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